

THE BECKONING FINGER

HARRY HARDING



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BY
HARRY HARDING

AUTHOR OF "THE HAWK OF REDE"



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THE BECKONING FINGER

CHAPTER I

THE AUSTRALIAN

MANY strange, fine types of men pass up and down the broad pavements of MacKenzie Street in the northern seaport of Bede. At any hour of the daytime you will see them : sailormen moving along in their slow, deliberate way ; pioneers of Empire home on European leave ; emigrants, bearded to the eyes, passing through towards El Dorados rich in the gold of dreams ; men back from the wander-path, forthright of gaze and carriage, bronzed of face, quick and decisive in action ; turbaned Hindus, soft-footed Lascars, slant-eyed, mysterious natives of the East : the shifting, drifting populace of the world at large. In such a street one needs must cut a notable, or at least an eccentric, figure to attract any marked attention. It was, therefore, emphatic testimony to the striking personality of David Grant that more than one passer-by should turn about and gaze after him as he moved amid the jostling throng.

In height he stood six feet two inches : for he was of that God-like Australian breed who wrote their deathless deeds of valour on the beaches of Gallipoli. He wore a loose-fitting, rough-spun suit which could not conceal the clean, muscular beauty of his body, nor detract from the swift grace of his walk. He was straight-backed, erect as a stag scenting the wind. A superabundant vitality, mental alertness, and unstained health were pictured in his brown, bony

face and the clear blue of his eye : a blue that had something of the deep, translucent quality of southern seas. Wide seas and wide, sun-filled spaces had added to their directness. They were " shooting " eyes, far-sighted, keen ; and in their depths there lurked a light of puckish humour, like the gleam of sunshine beneath clear water.

In the very middle of the pavement, in the busiest part of the street, he suddenly wheeled about to his left and looked across the roadway. It was as though some compelling force had pulled him round and directed his gaze. He looked straight into the face of a man sitting at luncheon by one of the open lower windows of the most select club in Bede. Instantly he grew tense and rigid. The next moment he was crossing the street with quick, purposeful strides. As he came beneath the window he shot a finger at the man, who was now leaning across the corner of the table staring at him with green eyes of fear.

" I've found you at last, Margesson," cried Grant ; " and make no mistake, I'm coming for you ! "

And then, as abruptly as he had spoken, he turned upon his heel and walked swiftly away.

The man Margesson sat back in his seat, and his weather-beaten, leather-coloured face had turned to the hue of putty. With frowning brows he continued to stare out of the window. His companion at table looked curiously at him, and remarked :

" Fine fellow that, Margesson. Seems as though he owed you a grudge. I'd hate to think he was coming for me ! "

" Mind your own business," growled Margesson. With an obvious effort he pulled himself together, and began to hurry through his lunch. The other man more leisurely continued his, and while he ate pondered idly on the strange conduct of Grant. It seemed to him a curious thing for a man, after having sought for

one so long, merely to threaten and then walk away.

But David Grant knew very well what he was about. He had no wish to encounter Margesson in a place like the club. He wanted elbow-room for his purpose !

CHAPTER II

SOWING AND REAPING

IF an ambitious man realises all his ambitions he may, with perfect truth, be called a successful person, though it will not necessarily mean that he is a happy one. Ralph Margesson could claim the first distinction ; as for the second, he was as happy as a man with green eyes can ever hope to be. The impulse to get on in the world had come to him at a very early age, and long before he had reached his 'teens he had sketched out a plan of his career, which later he embodied in a curious diagram devised after the fashion of a genealogical tree. He had taken the idea from a musty old history of the County families. As the son of a cobbler, he realised that it could never be his pride to boast of "descent" ; but, with a wisdom beyond his years, he had told himself that "ascent" had in it the greater personal glory, and was bound to be productive of a greater personal satisfaction. His Tree would be a true tree ; it would really grow upwards ! When words of discretion came to him, he called it his Tree of Achievement : and he swore an oath that it should mature to the tiniest twig.

With sinister deliberation and completeness he drew it up in boldly coloured inks on his first voyage as cabin-boy, and for years it went about the world with him in a battered old sea-chest, never growing, never adding fresh limbs as the sap of experience flowed more strongly. It was born fully developed, from root to leaf. As such it displayed a total lack of imagination, but on the other hand it did not soar beyond the realms of accomplishment.

The stem was wealth, to be attained by means of ships and shipping ; and from it there issued the three main branches which indicated his idea of power and fame. The first had reference to his family : a comfortable old age for his parents, and a life of ease and a wealthy marriage for his young sister. The second provided for the attainment of civic eminence in his native town of Bede, with due acknowledgment by the townspeople of his greatness and worth, which he even went the length of showing would properly be manifested in the shape of a statue placed in the open space at the top of MacKenzie Street. The third was really an assertion, in diagrammatic form, that at last the camel should pass through the needle's eye, for it required, no less, the admission of the shoemaker's son to full membership of the Gentlemen's Club, a coterie of nabobs with generations of successful trading behind them.

And now, at the age of thirty-five, Margesson's Tree was true, with but two exceptions that did not affect the real and solid achievement. One was the statue in MacKenzie Street, which in the nature of things it was yet premature to expect. The other was that clannishly conceived matter of his sister's welfare. She, a spirited and patriotic young lady, had had nothing but scorn for the methods by which he had, in his later years, built up his fortune. " Your money's red, Ralph ; red with the blood of the poor lads in France. I wouldn't touch a penny of it." And so she had gone her way, and married the man of her heart, a cabinet-maker who had taken her to face hardships—and happiness—in the wheat belt of Canada. Margesson had shrugged his shoulders, and was sorry : not for his sister, but because he had lost the opportunity to bask in what he had hoped would be the reflected glory of her marriage. His parents had been provided for, according to the terms of his diagram, and in that respect that particular branch

of the Tree had been infused with the sap of life. But they had died within a few months of entering on their new way of living—a way which had really been a burden to the simple, honest souls. This time Margesson was genuinely sorry, for in his cold way he loved his parents ; but even so he had derived his greatest solace at that period in realising that he had accomplished what he had set out to do.

And so, in all essentials, his Tree was true. There had never been a hitch, never a pause in the steady march to the appointed goal. At twenty-two he was mate of the cargo tramp in which he had made his first voyage ; at twenty-four he was captain of her. Three years later he left the sea and purchased a tug-boat, which he supplemented as a profit-producing medium by the investment of his remaining capital in a ship-chandlery business. Six months after that he picked up for a song an old coaster, bluff-bowed, and nearly as broad as she was long, but sea-worthy and seemingly unsinkable. She proved, almost literally, to be worth her weight in gold ; for a harassed government, in the throes of the War, subsequently hired her at a figure which staggered even Margesson, who had a Semitic and natural aptitude for driving a close bargain. That had been his opportunity, and he had seized it greedily, wolfishly, callous to the agony of travail through which his country was passing. He became as grasping and unscrupulous a profiteer as any those epic years produced. Peace thus found him rich beyond his uttermost dreams ; and two years later the camel had passed through the needle's eye, for as Mayor of Bede—civic eminence, indeed !—he made his entry into the Gentlemen's Club, with an indisputable right to sit in splendid state at its windows, and read his *Times* or eat his luncheon in the company of the best.

It was an irony of chance that this fulfilment of his long-cherished dream should, ere it could get itself

solidly established in reality, be the instrument by which the threatening, accusing figure of the Australian—a figure from the peaceful, pre-war past—was to be brought so sharply and dramatically before him. But for that vanity of his in sunning himself beneath the eye of the people, David Grant would have passed unheedingly by. The realisation was bitter to Margesson ; as also was the knowledge that a member of the Club had seen and heard, and might, nay probably would, place an imaginary construction on the incident, not at all to Margesson's credit.

After his hasty luncheon, he drove to his office in a very perturbed state of mind, and in the privacy of his room gave himself up to his thoughts. They were bridging the gulf of nearly a dozen years, traversing scenes and incidents which had long lain in the lumber-room of his memory, forgotten. They marked a period in his life when the turbulent currents of his youthful blood had broken down the dams of caution and restraint which he had built about himself, and interrupted the orderly, predestinated march of his career. In one hectic year he had sown his wild oats, and then had pulled himself up, all standing. That year was a gulf which six months of subsequent care and parsimony had bridged ; and so far as it had, until then, affected his life, it might never have been. Yet one sparse handful of that hasty sowing had rooted : and here it now was for the reaping.

That year, perhaps naturally enough, had been the first year of his captaincy, and already the vista of success was opening up to his eyes. Power and importance had come to him ; new and influential friends in the ports of call put opportunities of dissipation in his way. And so for a while he lost his balance. It was in a dance-hall in San Francisco that he had run foul of David Grant. His ship was laid up for repairs, and he had time to burn. A flower-lipped Circe of the hall had taken him in thrall. He haunted her,

pestered her ; but she had taken a violent dislike to the dark-visaged, stiffly-smiling sailor. She would have none of him : she who was customarily anyone's for the asking ! Even the slave of gaiety values her freedom ultimately to choose the partner of her frailty.

Then one evening there had strolled into the hall a young giant of a man, a picturesque figure in evening dress—David Grant. Curiosity had taken him there ; curiosity led him to the dance, and so into the arms of " Flower-lips." She had marked him for her own. But he was not any woman's. His life was clean, and for the most part was lived in the lonely places of the world. In his own good time he strolled out as he had strolled in, leaving " Flower-lips " mortified and angry. She found Margesson by her side—he was never very far away from it ! Ere Grant had passed through the doors she had said to Margesson :

" See that boob ? He has taken my purse. Go and hit him, and get it back."

And like a fool he had done her bidding. On the pavement outside the hall Margesson had spat out his accusation against the Australian. Grant merely laughed, seized Margesson about the waist and carried him into the hall much as one carries a parcel under the arm. He dumped the sailor down in front of " Flower-lips."

" Do you want me to prove that you're a liar, Miss, and that he's a fool ? " he asked her unsmilingly. She stood, nonplussed, biting her lips, and then had tittered.

" Who're you joshin' ? It was a joke. No need to prove me a liar, or him a fool."

And with a contemptuous glance at Margesson she whisked away.

Grant had shrugged his shoulders and turned about and left the hall without any further thought of the affair. Not so Margesson. He glared hatefully after the retreating form of the Australian, wheeled round

with a half-intention of going after the girl, and then sought his hat and coat and returned to the ship with rage and jealousy smouldering in his heart. The next day, in coming ashore, he had noticed Grant leaning over the bulwarks of a trim little schooner under whose counter his boat had passed. Grant had grinned down at him and called cheerily :

“ Found the purse yet ? ”

Several times, in his journeyings back and forth, a similar incident had occurred, until Margesson began to hate the sight of the schooner and the Australian. He learnt that Grant was its owner. A foolish desire—it was his year of folly—grew in him to take the grin from off the young man’s face, to drive that cheery taunt back into the mouth that gave it utterance. His native wisdom and caution urged him to forget the incident of the dance-hall, to banish Grant from his thoughts ; an over-mastering egotism drove him on to the thinking out of schemes by which he could level up the score. By continual dwelling on it that score grew vastly from the trivial dimensions in which it originated ; and at last Margesson almost came to believe that his repulsion by the girl was due entirely to Grant.

The day came when his ship was ready to sail. The schooner still remained. Margesson went ashore for the last time. As his boat was passing the schooner something hit him smartly on the cheek and dropped between his knees. It was a lady’s purse ! That decided him. He sought out a friend on the waterfront, with the result that Grant, as he was passing along the dock-side that night on his return to the ship, was “ shangaied ” and stowed away aboard Margesson’s vessel, which sailed at dawn.

Their next port was Sydney. Margesson saw to it that his stowaway was quickly discovered. He pretended surprise, pretended at first that he would ship Grant back to San Francisco in the first passing

steamer, and then almost immediately, with a slow smile on his lips, decided he would exercise his privilege as master and let Grant work his passage at a nominal wage. Grant had said never a word, but had very coolly and with incredible swiftness reached out and laid Margesson senseless on the deck. Margesson, when he recovered consciousness, at once ordered Grant to be put in irons. It took four men to do it. After his release, Margesson, taking care to keep out of reach of Grant's fists, did his evil best to make the Australian's life not worth the living. The dirtiest jobs, the roughest food, were his. Twice Grant's rage burst forth, and twice he was within striking distance of the captain, but each time was overborne by sheer weight of numbers. On one occasion he did get an opportunity to mount the bridge and confront Margesson. Instead of hitting him, the Australian had said, with biting contempt:

"You've a mind and soul the size of a carraway seed, Mr. Margesson. I admit in taunting you I wasn't very big-minded myself. But you are such a damned sour-looking cuss, and you've such a conceited air with you, that I believe I did it more for the good of your soul than for the fun of the thing. No, I'm not going to hit you any more. It doesn't suit me to spend another minute in irons. But when once I'm free of this ship I'm going to see to it that you get the biggest thrashing you ever had or are likely to have. You've taken a revenge out of all proportion to the injury I've done you."

Margesson's reply to this was to go a good way out of his course and kick Grant ashore on one of the Pacific Islands, the sole white population of which was one man. He had then steamed away, and, as he had thought, out of the Australian's life for ever.

And now, as he sat in his office this quiet summer's afternoon recalling these incidents, his first great fear returned to him. He remembered very vividly that

terrible blow, which had landed with the jarring effect of a pile-driver ; and he wondered what kind of a state he would be in had he to submit to a succession of them. He remembered also the bitter contempt of Grant in that brief interview on the bridge, and the measured glance of his eye. He grew angry at the thought of the man's vindictiveness in cherishing revenge all these years. Why hadn't he forgotten, and let the hand of time rob his hurts of their sting ? It was ill-luck that he should turn up now, just when things were going so well. One never knew what a fellow like Grant might do. He seemed a wealthy man : he could afford to spend as long as he liked in wresting retribution ; he could, if he cared, make things deuced awkward. Very moodily Margesson smoked a cigar, and under its soothing influence his customary complacence returned.

"Bah !" he said aloud, getting to his feet and striding about. "What can the fellow do ? I can protect myself. I'm not Mayor of this town for nothing."

It was in his mind to see the Chief Constable of the Borough and arrange to have a plain clothes officer set to watch his house. He would always travel about the town in his car, and so would be safe enough in his goings and comings. With a comfortable feeling of security engendered by these reflections he turned about to his desk and plunged into the business that awaited him.

CHAPTER III

THE FIGHT

THE father of David Grant, an Englishman settled in Australia, had turned his son loose at the age of sixteen, and told him to make his way in the world as he himself had done. David had joyfully accepted the challenge. "I shall make my way, dad," he had said, "but not as you have done." And had straightway proceeded to make it from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria; from Bahia Blanca to the sun-scorched towns west of the Andes; from Natal to Nigeria. Sailor, explorer, big-game hunter, South Sea trader, cowboy, gold-miner—it had been an epic succession of occupations, an epic schooling in the broad and simple philosophies of life.

The War had found him in the South Seas. He had hastened home—the first time in years; had enlisted and taken his part in the tragedy of the Dardanelles; had been wounded, but emerged in 1918 sound in mind and body. Another visit home, and then, with a present of a fat cheque from his father, once more to his wandering. He had gone back to an intermittent trading in the South Seas, until one day he suddenly decided that it was time he saw something more of Europe than his vocation as soldier had afforded him. He also had a whim to visit his father's birthplace. And so to Europe and to England he had come, in his own good time and in his own small schooner. Very leisurely he cruised about, putting in at such ports as took his fancy, and finally sailing up the Thames, owner of his ship like any millionaire, and captain of her, like very few. His father's birthplace was a little

village in the county of which Bede was the seaport, and to Bede he had eventually sailed. The day of his discovery of Margesson was the day of his arrival in the town.

After that dramatic meeting in MacKenzie Street he lost no time, but made at once for the Public Library, and from a Town Directory obtained all the information regarding Margesson and his activities that he wanted.

Thus it was that as the Mayor was preparing to leave his office that afternoon a few minutes before five o'clock there came a brusque knock upon the door, and an instant later David stepped within the room. He shut the door behind him and leaned against it, smiling.

"I walked right in. No one out there is to blame, so please don't raise a racket in the morning with that young missie at the enquiry window."

In a couple of long strides he was at Margesson's desk, and laid a leg across the corner where a push-button was set. Margesson stood by the hat and coat rack. David was between him and the door.

"I see you have a nice car outside, Margesson. I rather fancy a ride. I want to take a look at those two hills outside the town which so curiously resemble a woman's bosom when seen from the sea, and which I'm told are appropriately named the Hills of Love. You are going to drive me there."

Margesson slowly reached for his hat, and as slowly placed it on his head.

"You mistake, Grant. I do not hire out my car. I'm not taking you for a drive."

It was bravely enough said, and his green eyes looked steadily into those of the Australian. But his mouth was dry, and there was a feeling like false hunger at the pit of his stomach.

David smiled, and swung his leg. He glanced carelessly about the office.

"As you please," he said. "I suggested the drive

for your sake, not mine. This room's big enough, though you've got it so nicely furnished it seems a pity to mess it about."

He suddenly stood up, reached out a hand and grasped Margesson by the clothes at his chest. The smile had left his face ; his eyes gleamed coldly. Then with an astonishing display of strength he swung the Mayor off his feet and laid him flat upon his back, and in the same movement stood him up straight again.

"You see ? " he said. " If I hit you too hard I might break you up against the walls."

"You might," said Margesson. " And when my people hear the noise of fighting, what do you think they'll do ? "

"They won't hear. We shall wait until they are gone."

"Two of the clerks are working late to-night."

"Still we shall wait. I'm not letting you go, Margesson."

"But dammit all, man, why be so vindictive ? What good is it going to do you to thrash me ? I didn't do you any real harm. I wonder at you cherishing hatred all these years."

David laughed.

"That's a queer sort of speech for a man to make. It sounds panicky. It's the sort of way a girl would talk. My dear sir, I haven't cherished hatred all these years. I don't hate you. You aren't worth the trouble. I'd almost forgotten you. But now that I've found you I'm going to thrash you in cold blood, because you had the arrogance to shanghai me. I've simply got to get you off my conscience, Margesson. I want to tread on you, as I would upon a viper that bit me."

Margesson breathed heavily.

"I could call for help. You wouldn't get far with your thrashing."

"Yes, you could do that. It would be a woman's trick—and a coward's."

The taunt sank home. A dull flush spread over Margesson's leather-coloured face. He was not without courage; and he was filled to the brim with pride. The two worked suddenly like yeast within him, so that his manhood rose at last to lend him dignity.

"Anyhow," he said, quietly, "you've got to prove first of all that you *can* thrash me."

A smile of delight broke over David's face.

"What? You mean to fight?"

"I do. I'll take you for that ride, and I'll do my best to make you pay for it, and eat those words of yours."

A look of approbation came into the Australian's eyes.

"That's the kind of talk," he said; "shall we be going?"

Margesson led the way from the office. With quiet deliberation he got into his car, and motioned to David to take the seat beside him. When they were moving swiftly and smoothly out of the town the Australian said:

"I like a fight in the hour of danger, or in the heat of anger; and thrashing a man is a mere act of duty. But this—why, we are like a couple of schoolboys or navvies. Some people would say it was degrading to go off to a fight like this."

Margesson gave him a swift glance from the corner of his eye.

"You should have thought of that sooner," he muttered, gaze intent on the road ahead.

"We'll come back with bloody noses, and black eyes," went on David, musingly; "at least you will, Margesson. And as Mayor of this town you will be a distinctly humorous spectacle. A coal-trimmer or a brewer's drayman can wear a black eye with dignity,

and even cut a romantic figure in it. But a Mayor—oh, sugar!”

He chuckled quietly to himself, and studied the profile of Margesson with twinkling, smiling eyes.

“I say,” he went on again; “have you any public engagements within the next day or two? I don’t want to embarrass you in your civic duties, and we could easily postpone this little affair to a more convenient time.”

Once more Margesson glanced swiftly at him, and said sneeringly:

“You seem to be getting the wind up. Don’t talk so much. You’ve got to fight—now!”

David lounged negligently in his seat, half-turned to his driver. He was silent awhile, and the car sped rapidly on along a road which ran southwards by the cliffs. The blue, untroubled sea lay on their left, while ahead could be seen, in the distance, the cone-like outline of the nearer hill towards which they were travelling. Presently the Australian spoke again.

“I’m sorry to have to talk, Margesson; but I’m wondering if you’re married.”

“I’m not,” snapped Margesson.

“Oh, well, that makes things a bit easier. I wasn’t wanting to distress your womenfolk. Live with your mother?—or sister, perhaps?”

“I live alone.”

“That’s capital,” said David, with unduly stressed relief in his voice. “We can put some ginger into it now; and when it’s all over we can hang around until it is dark, and then I’ll drive you unnoticed into town.”

Margesson compressed his lips, and accelerated the car.

“I’m hoping to do any driving that’s required.”

“There’s no harm in hoping,” replied David, taking out his cigarette case and proffering it to Margesson,

who refused. "And I'm beginning to admire your spirit. You make me very happy."

He lounged still more negligently, and drew at his cigarette with evident enjoyment. After glancing carelessly ahead he remarked :

"Words seem to flow from me just now like water from a tap. I must really apologise ; but I see that hill has a nice flat top. I couldn't have fixed on a better place. Ever do any boxing, Margesson ? "

Margesson did not deign to reply, and David went on :

"You've a pretty pair of fists, at any rate ; and you look tough. How is your wind ? We won't be able to conduct the fight according to rules. It'll be a continuous performance, like that stowaway job you fixed on me." He was quiet for a few moments, and then resumed, chuckling : "Life's a queer affair, like those rambling conversations one sometimes has—you know—two fellows start talking, say, of petrol pumps or safety pins, and one topic will lead to another until they find themselves discussing the origin of the pyramids. Take our little business. A woman's mythical purse in 'Frisco, and two stiffes who ought to know better hammering at each other on a hill-top in England, with nearly a dozen years between. It sounds like a madman's dream, and yet the connecting steps are quite logical and natural . . . you don't seem to be interested, Steve. Perhaps you are one of those who like to pray before they enter the fight. I'll be quiet now, and let you seize the exalted mood. I'll sit and think of that Pacific Island on which you dumped me, and the drink-sodden wraith of humanity with whom I had to spend three profitless months. That'll give *me* the right spirit."

Margesson sat immovable at the wheel of the car, looking straight ahead, gloomy, unsmiling, irritated almost beyond endurance by David's joyous, jocular demeanour, for he had at last realised that the

Australian had for most of the time been mocking him. But of the genuineness of David's concern for his enemy's womenkind there had been no possible mistaking, and this had produced in Margesson a feeling of inferiority that his pride found hard to stomach. He was not, himself, impelled to wonder how he would have acted in similar circumstances and under similar provocation, for he was not given to introspection ; but he none the less had this heavy sense of being on a totally different mental and moral plane from the man he had so grievously wronged, and he wanted, consumedly, to prove that physically at least he was the equal of the Australian. What he lacked in strength and height he must make up in cunning and superiority of brain ; for in his tremendous conceit he arrogated that to himself.

This was the mood, not the exalted one that David had ironically endued him with, in which he put his car to a long, winding slope, at the summit of which a gateway gave access to a cart-track that led between the two hills. Margesson drove the car through the gate and then bumped his way towards a level stretch of sward. The two men got out, and David surveyed the hills with critical eyes. The further one displayed a rocky, cliff-like face on the side from which he viewed it, whilst the other—the one he had chosen for the scene of the combat—was almost perfectly conical in shape, with not too steep a slope leading to the flattened top.

" Well, shall we go up ? " said David.

" Is it necessary ? " asked Margesson. " We couldn't have a better place than where we now stand. We are screened from the road, while on top we'll be in full view of anyone who may be passing. We'll also be less liable to interruption here."

" That's true enough," said Grant. " It's all one to me. I'd set my heart on having it out on that hill-top because I should say there's a good view of the sea

from it—it would have been more exhilarating. But you'll not be wanting an audience. Righto, Steve—here let it be."

Very briskly he began taking off his coat and vest, and rolling up his sleeves. More slowly Margesson followed suit, and then placed himself in a sparring attitude before the waiting Australian. His long, dark face was grimly set; in his green eyes was the determination of one who goes forth to meet great odds, and in his crafty brain he was thinking to himself: "I must be wary, and unscrupulous. He'll fight fair—but I shall not. It is my only chance of winning."

The greatest disparity between the two men was in height. Margesson had to give four inches; but in muscle and girth he was very nearly the equal of David, and probably weighed as much. He was sturdy, with the great depth of chest that is the characteristic of most sailors. In his movements he was slow compared with the quick, rippling grace of his opponent, and his body did not give the impression of possessing anything like the nerve force or driving energy which seemed pent up in David's supple frame.

Margesson tried rush tactics at first, and jumped for David ere the latter was quite ready. The Australian leaped back, and Margesson's blow just failed in reaching its mark by a fraction of an inch. David laughed, stalled off his opponent, and then coolly and scientifically upper-cut him. Margesson shook his head and came in again, sparring skilfully.

"Ah, I see you've used them before," said David with glee. And far from giving way to Margesson's impetuous rush, he stepped in and joined issue, smiling, his blue eyes gleaming with a mocking light. He went to it joyously, with swift duckings and feintings, and rhythmical patter of feet. He even hummed a snatch of song. Then amidst the blur of movements his fist flashed upwards, and once more Margesson received that jarring upper-cut. He staggered back, guard wide

open ; but David did not take advantage of the opportunity. He waited, almost courteously it seemed. Margesson glowered balefully at him, and came again, but more warily this time. And he fought afterwards with greater care. But always, as the fight went on, he was getting the worst of it. He brought to bear the utmost skill he possessed, tried every trick of fence and tactics that he knew, gave foul blows repeatedly, tripped and even kicked. Yet still the smiling, mocking face of David interposed itself between his gaze and the sunny, jocund evening, and still, at intervals, David hit him, apparently just when he pleased ; and each succeeding blow seemed harder than the one before it. The Australian was unruffled and even slightly amused at the shady methods of his opponent. Sullen anger raged within the heart of Margesson ; his pride was galled at the realisation that after all it was really no fight. He knew that David was but toying with him, and was holding in leash a strength and ability that, did he but give it free play, would batter him into unconsciousness with the inevitability of fate. It was bitter knowledge, also, that instead of the ignoble thrashing he so richly deserved he was being granted this more dignified means of paying the penalty of his folly of long ago. He could not understand such chivalrous and generous treatment, which, instead of calling forth his gratitude, only served to inflame his anger, and give greater hurt to his pride and conceit. The beast rose up in him. While he had the strength he would deal a blow that would bring the Australian to his knees. The smiling devil should not win, should not lord it over him with his damnable superiority, nor mock him by his courteous demeanour. He dealt the blow. It was an unspeakably foul one. David gasped, sagged suddenly, and staggered back, writhing in pain. Sweat stood upon his brow ; his face turned green. Like a tiger Margesson followed up his advantage, and began to rain a shower of blows upon the unprotected face of

his antagonist. David turned away, a groaning, pathetic figure ; kept turning away, dodging as best he could some of the blows, and warding off others with arms now crooked round his head. And so he stumbled about, all his splendid vitality for the moment gone, stalling for time, grimly waiting for his agony to abate. And with each second that passed it did abate ; with each second his strength came flowing back, and presently he straightened himself, and faced Margesson. The latter's heart sank within him, for on the face of Grant was written a righteous, consuming anger. His blue eyes were bleak and bereft of their smile ; his mouth was a straight, grim line. Margesson saw vengeance coming for that foul blow. It came, and struck him like a blast. As is a leaf in the storm, he was driven hither and thither, beaten down, and crushed. He felt himself being grievously hurt, and knew in his heart that he deserved to be. A great fear came upon him. This fury of vengeance that he had aroused, would it kill him ere it spent itself ? He realised dully, as in sheer panic he turned and tried to fight back, that unless it was stayed it might do so. He felt helpless, like a child ; consciousness was gradually leaving him. He sank weakly to his knees, and looked pitifully up into the eyes of David, who now towered like a figure of doom above him, and in them he read only scorn and contempt. David, for a long moment, gazed down on Margesson, and then from his whitened lips came the words :

“ You dirty cur ! ”

And instead of dealing the final blow, which Margesson knew would send him whirling down the abyss of unconsciousness, David merely gave the kneeling man a ringing box on the ears that knocked him sideways, and then spurned him with his foot, and ground his face into the trodden sward.

It was then that a swift, light thud of running feet was heard, and a figure suddenly thrust itself between

Grant and the prostrate man. David stared down into the indignant face of a girl.

"You brute!" she was crying; "haven't you any mercy?"

David stepped back a pace and eyed her coolly.

"None, Miss," he replied. "And now will you stand aside, please?"

But the girl bravely stood her ground.

"You shan't strike another blow!"

"I don't intend to," he said, reaching out his arm and roughly sweeping her out of his way. Margesson still lay on the grass, his head buried in his arms. David rolled him over, and stood looking down at his bruised and earth-stained face. In the green eyes, staring upwards, was still the panic of fear, to which was added the pain of physical hurts and deep humiliation.

"Can you stand up?" David asked him curtly.

For answer Margesson rose stiffly and unsteadily to his feet, looked at the girl, shuddered, and turned and staggered a few steps away. David was about to stride after him when the girl again thrust herself between them.

"What are you going to do to him?"

A shade of annoyance passed across the face of the Australian.

"I wish you wouldn't interfere, Miss. It would be better if you just passed on."

"I must know what you are going to do to him, or I shall go for the police."

David looked at the girl with a little more interest than he had as yet vouchsafed her. He noted her angry, scornful eyes, her hostile poise before him. He suddenly smiled.

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"No, although I think I know who he is."

"Then I'm sure he'll all the more appreciate your—your humanitarian concern for his welfare."

What do you think I'm going to do to him—murder him ? ”

“ You've just about done that already.”

David looked at the girl with piercing eyes.

“ Have you been here all the time ? ” he asked her abruptly.

“ No. I was passing to go between the hills along that path. I stood and watched you for about two minutes.”

“ Ah ! Then if you ask him—— ” pointing to Margesson—“ he might tell you that at first I fought him fair ; but he'll never tell you, even if you become his dearest friend, why, in the end, I thrashed him and made him eat dirt.”

The girl stood coldly sceptical.

“ He's not likely to become my dearest friend. I can only believe what my eyes told me. I don't believe you were thrashing him ; and that's why I won't move from here until I've satisfied myself what you are going to do to him.”

A frown drew down the brows of Grant.

“ You don't believe I was thrashing him ? Why, what else could I have been doing ? ”

“ Satisfying your lust of brutality,” came the swift retort. “ Surrendering yourself to the instinct of the beast within you—coming perilously near murder ! ”

David stared, and then thrust out his hand and gripped the girl's shoulder.

“ Look into my eyes,” he cried in tones of command, “ and unsay that remark.”

His grip was so hard that it brought a grimace of pain to the girl's face ; but she bore it unflinchingly, and found herself looking up into David's eyes, impelled against her will by that ringing voice. Eyes looked into eyes, and she felt his gaze piercing to the very marrow of her soul. Something stirred faintly within her : it was like the quiver of a pool as the summer

breeze passes over it. Suddenly she spoke, and her remark startled him by its sheer unexpectedness.

"They are very blue," she murmured.

She saw David's eyes widen, and then their customary light of puckish humour began to shine in them. He withdrew his hand and laughed.

"I didn't ask for compliments, but I take it you see no beast behind the blue."

The girl smiled.

"No more of it than any of us have."

He stepped back a pace, and now in his eyes there began to grow a look of admiration. The beauty of the girl had suddenly struck home to his senses. There was sunshine and laughter in her face, and they had peeped out for a moment from behind the clouds of scorn and indignation which until then had veiled them. She was of a type that only England can produce : the type that seems to require fresh blowing winds, soft sunshine, and cool rains to bring to its perfect blooming. But she was only partly true to this type. Roses certainly—June roses—were in her cheeks, and for her mouth an orchard had been rifled ; but her hair was dark, though not altogether black, and when the sun shone through it a dark fire seemed to smoulder amid its strands ; her eyes, too, were dark, and fringed by long, dark lashes ; her skin was of the texture of the lily, and as fair. It was as though Nature had somewhat mixed her pigments, with a result that was wholly unusual and alluring. In her short-skirted summer frock her tall figure displayed its slender, graceful lines, and gave hint of swift movements and the swaying rhythm of the reed.

To her last remark David made answer :

"I think you wrong yourself, and your sex, in lumping us all together. I see no beast in your eyes. Still, it was a fair answer, and I'd be a glutton if I wasn't more than satisfied. As for what I was going to do to this—gentleman : why, it was nothing very

bad ; only to help him to his car and see him safely home."

The girl half-turned and looked towards Margesson with eyes full of compassion. He had faced in her direction, and he, too, stood gazing at her with admiring eyes. At the girl's glance he hung his head, and then rather shamefacedly began to walk with slow and faltering steps across the level sward towards where his car stood. As he passed David and the girl he shot his late antagonist a venomous look. When he reached his car he very deliberately climbed in, started the engine, and without any more ado turned about and drove away.

"Well, that's that," said David, laughing, as he stooped to pick up his coat. "And now I've got to walk it back to town. I suppose it was too much to expect him to drive me there."

The girl had begun rather shyly to move away. David watched her take a few slow and hesitating steps ; and then she suddenly turned about, came back, and faced him. Her dark eyes were lifted steadily to his. A quiver of rebellion ran through him as he thrilled to their beauty and gazed deep to the mystery of the woman's soul behind them.

"I take back those words," she said. "I see now that he must have done some vile thing to cause you to be so—so terrible. I don't suppose my taking them back really matters a jot to you, for we are strangers and shall not meet again. But I want you, for my own peace of mind, to know that I have realised I was wrong."

She turned, this time swiftly, and ran across the sward and took to the path which wound about between the two hills. An impulse to go after her stirred strongly within the Australian. But he fought it down. He was still in rebellion, for the appeal of this girl's beauty and charm was stronger than any he had ever yet experienced.

"No, Dave," he muttered: "let her go. She spells danger."

And yet he stood and watched her until she vanished behind the further hill. An insistent longing was knocking at his heart. He felt suddenly lonely: alone. Then with an impatient gesture he wheeled about and set off for Bede.

CHAPTER IV
CAVEMAN AND GREEK

MARION FAY, for so the girl was called, ran for much longer than was necessary after she had passed from David's view behind the hill. She ran until the path she followed came out upon a small ravine which lay somewhat to the south of the Hills of Love. She would, in all probability, have furiously denied that she was trying to run away from herself, or that a pair of challenging blue eyes had so shifted her mental centre of gravity that she did not know whether she ran on her feet or her head. Yet such were indeed the facts, and it was not until she had turned into the ravine that she abruptly slowed down to a walk and, figuratively, stared at herself. She continued the remaining portion of the journey in a softened, meditative mood.

The ravine was known as Frenchman's Gully. On its steep, sandy sides grew sparse bushes of gorse, and at the bottom a thin rivulet trickled over a boulder-strewn bed. There was no tradition that a Frenchman had ever set foot in the ravine, but in the days of the Napoleonic Wars wild rumour had said that the terrible Emperor intended to land a force at the cove into which the Gully opened ; though rumour had never explained exactly what he hoped to gain by such a proceeding, still less of how he was to accomplish it. It did eventually see an invasion, but not until another war had roared and thundered over Europe : an invasion of peaceable citizens from Bede. A certain contractor in the town, having bought a quantity of army huts because they were going cheap, had got rid of his incubus by

converting them into roomy, comfortable bungalows and setting them in cunningly chosen spots up and down the sides of the ravine ; and as the cove was one of the best bathing places in the neighbourhood, Frenchman's Gully had soon become a resort for the more unorthodox and adventurous spirits of the town, whence they could retire at week-ends and evenings all the summer through, and bathe and play the gramophone and cook their own meals and wear their bedroom slippers in the open air.

* * * * *

Marion had said to her father :

"Daddy, I'm going to buy a bungalow in Frenchman's Gully."

Her father, a moderately wealthy shipbuilder, and a spare, vigorous man of fifty, had replied decisively :
"My dear, you are not."

He had old-fashioned views about girls. The Women's Suffrage movement had left him unconvinced ; and he had been too busy making ships during the War to notice that the modern maid had reached out and grasped a whole heap of notions and liberties for which she was ready to fight to the last ditch. Marion had sometime previously startled her father with an idea which was to him nothing short of iconoclastic. He had given her an expensive education ; and when she was finished with tutors and college she had said :

"And now, daddy, after all your trouble and expense, what are you going to do with me ? What use are you going to put me to ? "

The good man had irritably rubbed his nose and stuttered :

"Use, child ? You are to stay at home and be happy, of course, and have a good time, and—and—get married eventually, I suppose. Use ? I don't know what you mean."

"Well," Marion had replied, "you've had me

polished until I can coruscate in three languages. I'm superbly healthy. I've the constitution of a horse. I can swim ten miles, play tennis from morning 'til eve, and ditto hockey. I can run, jump, ride. I can be happy anywhere and anyhow, and I can work like three niggers. And all I'm to do is to stay at home and be an ornament, and then get married and be, perhaps, a vegetable! I could have qualified for those states without all this trouble. No, dad, I'm going to find some work to do; I'm going to earn my own living."

And in spite of her parent's opposition, Marion eventually had her way. She obtained a post at a girls' college in the town as gymnasium instructress and teacher of languages; and at the end of each month, when she drew her salary, she religiously sought her father in his study and there, to his perpetual indignation, insisted on paying him the money for her board. He used to take it as though he expected it to bite him, and was unhappy until he had passed it over to his wife. She, a gently smiling lady with much wholesome good sense, from whom Marion derived the sunshine and laughter in her soul, set the money aside in the bank to accumulate for her daughter. The shipbuilder had been sorely troubled about it all, and when Marion announced her intention of buying the bungalow he really thought the world had turned topsy-turvy.

"Child, you are not. I'll not hear of it. You—you mean to stop out there for week-ends by yourself? Alone?——"

"Yes, dad; and evenings as well."

"It's preposterous. It's—it's not decent." He turned to his wife: "Mary, take her away and tell her why she cannot."

But Marion had already won her mother over, and the shipbuilder found himself in a minority of one. His wife had said to him later: "Billy, let her have her way. She'll come to no harm. It amuses her to think she's able to stand alone. It's the new spirit.

Girls nowadays seek independence, but it's not altogether for its own sake. She is keen to live her life in the modern way ; but you and I, dear, know that ultimately she'll live it according to our teaching and example. She'll be true to herself and to us. Have no fear."

And the shipbuilder, who really could deny his daughter nothing, and who placed the utmost confidence in his wife's good sense, acquiesced with a half-humorous show of despair. "It may be all right, but it doesn't seem to me to be wise to let our girl sleep there alone. It's asking for trouble." One thing he insisted on, and that was the protection of a dog for Marion. And as though in proportion to his fear of possible danger he bought the biggest dog he could find—a mighty and noble-looking Great Dane. Marion had laughed gleefully. "Oh, you dear old daddy, he's as big as a church, and could keep a regiment at bay. But he's lovely, and I'll have him always lie outside my bedroom door."

* * * * *

Marion was of the finest type of athletic girl. In her slim, graceful body was stored the quintessence of energy, a nerve-force thrice refined. It was no vain boast of hers that she could swim ten miles. Of all her physical activities she found in swimming the completest gratification of her perennial desire for prolonged and vigorous movement. She swam as naturally, as easefully, as she walked or ran. Throughout the summer she bathed twice a day ; and it was to indulge in her evening swim that she was now on her way to the bungalow, and had thus stumbled on the fight between David and Margesson.

She arrived at the hut still in meditative mood, and obviously impressed with her adventure. When she stripped to put on her costume she had a glimpse of her white, rounded shoulder where David had gripped it,

and on the soft skin there showed redly the impression of his fingers.

"He *was* rather magnificently terrible," she murmured to herself; "a mixture of Caveman and Greek. He cannot know how strong he is."

She smoothed her bruises, and the flesh was painful to the touch. Reflectively she flung her bathing wrap about her and strolled down to the beach, and in the same thoughtful way entered the water and broke automatically into her swift trudgeon stroke. It was her custom to develop at first a fierce and sustained effort; but on this occasion she very soon found herself ambling gently along, and thinking a great deal. Thoughts can come easily when one is swimming, if the action is smooth and effortless. Marion's spirit was still responding to that imperious, mastering glance of David's; her mind was filled with recurring images of him, her memory conning over the things he had said. Suddenly she shook herself in the water, turned with an impatient swirl after having gone but half the distance she usually did, and headed back for the cove. On the beach she encountered a slim, dark-haired young man with the humorously-ugly face of a comedian and the expression of a philosopher. He had just returned from a swim much shorter than Marion's, curtailed though that had been.

"Hullo, Marion!" he cried.

"Hullo, Johnny!" she responded, as she stooped to pick up her bathing wrap and fling it about her.

"You've cut it short this evening," said the young man; "I saw you go in. Find the water cold?"

"Never noticed it, Johno," replied Marion, rather absently, starting off to cross the beach. "Just lazy, I suppose."

The young man ranged himself alongside her, and together they took the path up the ravine. There was silence between them until they had almost reached Marion's hut: the privileged silence of two old friends.

The young man had stolen several glances at her profile, and the subdued, pensive expression on her face set him thinking. Presently they paused at a point where a path took off across the ravine leading to the young man's bungalow on the other side ; and he wondered still more when Marion said to him ere they separated :

" Come over and have supper with me on the verandah, Johno. And bring the gramophone and all the dance records. There'll be a lovely moon, and we can have a jig all to ourselves."

At this a sudden smile gleamed in the young man's bright, dancing eyes.

" Righto, old sport. Be over presently." He was turning away when he paused and looked at her across his shoulder. " Er, not feeling up to snuff ? "

" Fit as a fiddle, Johno. Don't I look it ? "

" In the pink," he replied, with a grin that made him look more like a comedian than ever ; " but there's an expression on your face as though you had swallowed a pin and were wondering where it would stick ! "

She raised her foot and with a vigorous push sent him spinning down the path.

" Irreverent devil," she laughed. " You should have more respect for a girl's deep thoughts."

When he had stopped sliding he looked up.

" Oh, thoughts ? I see. Yes, certainly, they would have just that surprising effect ! "

She took off one of her beach shoes and flung it at his head.

" That's done it," she cried. " I was going to fry you some chips, and make you an omelette, like " —mockingly— " those you used to have in France. But now all you'll get will be sardines—in the tin ! "

" Oh, don't ! " he answered with a tragic hunch of his shoulders. " You know that anything from a tin always reminds me of ' Plum and Apple ' and Maconochies and things. Be good, fair maid, and let who will be cruel. Make it chips, *cara mio* ; and if not

an omelette, then pork sausage. I know you have some, for I saw the boy set it in the porch not an hour ago . . . ah ! Marion, do not torture your Robin so ! Relent, forgive, and I'll be reverent to your deepest thoughts, and sing you songs in Arabic forbye ! Thoughts ? What a beautiful thought is pork sausage, and golden chips, sizzling hot"—his voice trailed emotionally away—"and what a beautiful thought God had when he thought of you !"

"Sling that shoe back, Johnny Cossar, and less of your blarney," cried Marion, laughing in spite of herself, "and I'll think about the sausage."

"Then will your thoughts be truly deep, and I be truly thankful," said Johnny, as he threw the shoe. "By-by for the present." And he went off down the path singing : "O ! fry those chips !"

John Whiteford Cossar, to give him his full title, was the son of a well-to-do farmer in the neighbourhood ; and Johnny had always said that his father invented his second name in order that some day it could be displayed on a brass plate. Mr. Cossar, senior, had indeed decided on the day his son was born that the boy should be a doctor ; but Johnny had later decided otherwise.

"No, dad," he had said firmly ; "not for me. Have I the bedside manner, for one thing, let alone the bedside face ? I have not, and well you know it. We'll think of something else ; something cheerful. But rest assured, dad, we won't waste that middle name of mine. We'll find a brass plate for it somehow."

And so, having noticed one day a handsome young man in a golfing jacket and riding breeches engaged in the manipulation of an instrument on a tripod, which he afterwards learned was a theodolite, he inconsequently decided that that seemed a bright, interesting occupation. "And we can still have our brass plate, dad," he said. "J. Whiteford Cossar, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.I., Architect and Surveyor. You

couldn't possibly want anything better than that? "

Thus at twenty-four Johnny found himself installed in a small suite of offices in a big building in MacKenzie Street, with a really noble brass plate which dwarfed all the others displayed at the entrance door. He did not at first have a great deal to survey, except the varied stream of humanity passing up and down before the office window ; nor had he the occasion to design any building more concrete than fairy castles in the air. But that caused him no worry, for he had a substantial allowance from his father, who was secretly very proud of his son.

Johnny had bright, twinkling eyes which were extraordinarily observant. His ears were large, and so was his mouth : " necessarily large," he was wont to say, " for one with the digestion of an ostrich and the curiosity of a monkey, from which or whom there is no doubt at all I'm descended. Every time I look in the glass I'm convinced." Life for Johnny was a jest. He saw everything in terms of a joke, and he had an incorrigible habit of butting into a serious conversation with some whimsical, and occasionally some mordant, witticism, or of turning off a sentimental remark by a piece of buffoonery. In consequence he wasn't very well liked by certain people who took themselves seriously.

He and Marion had known each other since childhood. Their parents were friends before them, and the children had been thrown much together. The early years of school life had brought the inevitable separation, and when the two met again the shy eyes of adolescence had taken up a mutual appraisement, and from that moment there had never been any other girl for Johnny. But Marion had found no stirring of her youthful imagination. Johnny was still her dearest friend, the whimsical, jesting chum. Time slipped by, and still it was the same : he, beneath his careless,

brotherly attitude concealing a reverence and love that grew ever stronger as he came to his early manhood ; she taking him more or less for granted, and content to have him make her laugh, and play games with her, and be still her " dear old sport." Then had come the War, and an unforgettable leave during its last phases. They had seen much of each other in that brief time. Marion had been sweet and kind, and he had gone about with her, a jest ever on his lips, spending money feverishly, burning the hours away in search of gaiety and pleasure, and finding neither the one nor the other. The last day of leave came, and with it the mute longings for the time when the mad world would regain its sanity ; the unspoken dread of the return to the trenches ; and, on Marion's part, the fear that that might indeed easily be the last leave in the dread acceptance of the term. He had in the end spoken potently of his love for her, and she, with the desire to give in that time of great giving, had misinterpreted her feelings, had suffered him to take her hungrily into his arms, where she had lain giving kiss for kiss, but, strangely enough, speaking no actual word of love. Had Johnny been less intuitive, less observant, he might easily have been deceived. But there was in Marion's attitude a faint lack of spontaneity ; her kisses had not the fervent fire that inspired his own. The scene just failed of ringing true, and Johnny had gone back to France depressed in the knowledge that Marion did not really love him, but comforted in his conscience that he had not pressed home an advantage which had been wrongly reached, and wrung from her a definite avowal and promise of marriage. In his letters he never referred to that love scene ; at which Marion had wondered but for which she was secretly thankful. On his return from the War he had greeted her in the old brotherly way, except for one long, keen look, the meaning of which she understood well enough. He had seen then what he had

feared to see—a warm and affectionate welcome, certainly, but mingled with an indefinable reticence which he knew was purely involuntary, but which laid bare her soul to him. He had shaken his head, gripped her shoulder, made some common-place remark, and passed on to greet her father. Again she understood : understood that he had seen in her eyes a determination to abide by that mute surrender when she had lain in his arms, but that he refused to countenance it, and held her to nothing. She felt something approaching reverence for him then ; but in the privacy of her bedroom that night made sorrowful confession to herself : “ I can’t—I can’t ! It isn’t love I have for him. He knows it too, the chivalrous old sport that he is. Poor dear Johnno, I wish I could—for I’ll never know a finer man.”

* * * * *

“ It’s not the omelette, then ? ” said Johnny. “ I’m not completely forgiven ? ”

“ Oh, quite, Johnno. But I found I only had a couple of eggs.”

“ And so you made sausage-toad-in-the-hole ? And a savoury peace-offering it is, in spite of its cacophonous name ! . . . I say, old sport, you are beastly kind to me to-night. I really haven’t deserved this.”

“ Don’t be sentimental, Johnny. And don’t begin to analyse a person’s motives.”

“ I—sentimental ? I’m only sentimental when there’s grub to eat. I’m positively not—not sentimental : only appreciative. As for analysis—my dear, I accept what the gods have sent.”

He nevertheless was really wondering. There was that in Marion’s manner, in her looks, which sent his memory swinging back over the years, to that night when he had declared his love. Then she had been pensive, brooding, as she was now ; had given him just

such occasional, questioning glances as she had been doing ever since he had brought the gramophone over and settled himself comfortably in a chair on the verandah. The conversation repeatedly flagged. She alternated between gaiety and sudden, inconsequent lapses into silence. He wondered, and a wild hope was knocking at his heart.

When supper was finished and Marion had cleared the things away, he put a record on the gramophone, and they began to dance. The daylight had not yet faded from the western sky, and in the east a full moon had risen, and hung over the waters a yellow, distorted disc of orange. The verandah faced towards the sea, and within its shadows they were assured of almost complete privacy. Marion was languorous, yielding, softly pliant in Johnny's clasp. She came deeper in his embrace than the formality of the dance required. It seemed to his thrilling senses that she was deliberately surrendering herself to him, mutely asking that he should take her wholly in his arms. During three dances she was like this, and in the pauses between each she had sat deep in her chair, head back, her arms thrown upward about her head, staring dreamily at the sky. She replied absently to his remarks, but showed a readiness for each succeeding dance that seemed to belie her pensive mood. He was completely puzzled, yet in every nerve was re-acting to her sweet seductiveness. In the fourth dance she let her head rest for a moment on his shoulder ; then she looked up at him with troubled eyes, shook her head ever so slightly, and stopped dancing. With gentle resistance she made to withdraw from his clasping arms ; but at this he suddenly gripped her and held her close. She lay back with both arms drooping languidly by her sides. He bent his face to hers.

" Yes, Johnno," she whispered : " kiss me—fiercely ! "

He did so, with a passionate eagerness ; held his lips on hers for moments which seemed to him minutes

of swooning bliss. But there was no answering fire in her lips, no return of his caress. Then with a lithe twist of her body she slipped from his embrace, walked to her chair and sank slowly into it. He came and stood over her.

"What does it mean?" he asked hoarsely.

She was long in replying. At last:

"It was an experiment," she murmured—"to see if I loved you, Johnno."

"But why—why?" he asked. "Did you not know? Couldn't you tell without—without——"

She shook her head.

"I don't even know yet, Johnno. I've wanted to love you for—ever since that other time. But it just doesn't seem to be love—the feeling I have for you."

He went and sat on the verandah rail.

"It cannot be, or you'd never have wanted to try that experiment."

"No," she answered. "I've always thought it must be as self-evident as the—the measles!"

"It is," he replied with a bitter laugh that brought her head up with a start. "And your experiment, Marion—don't you think it was just a little cruel?"

At this she rose to her feet with a low cry, and placed her hand on his arm.

"Oh, Johnny, have I hurt you? . . . why didn't I think! But don't you see, it was because I *wanted* to love you. It wasn't—wasn't coquetry, Johnno; you're not thinking that?"

"No."

"Then what? . . . oh, Johnny, what have I done? It was for you I did it, because you are—you: my dear old sport. Haven't I said I wanted to love you? Johnno, I'll marry you if you—if you'll have me!"

He was silent a long while.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked at last, still standing at his side in a waiting attitude.

"I'm trying to understand," he said.

"It's simple, isn't it? I've offered myself to you."

He laughed suddenly, his old chuckling, cheerful laugh.

"There, there, old girl, don't say that any more. I reckon you'd come to think me pretty mean if I took you at your word. I'd sell my soul for you, dear, and my brass plate as well; but I'd not marry you without your love. When a fellow's so hungry he wants a whole baron of beef to himself, an offering of ice-cream will only rile him. Still, you say you don't know whether you love me or not; so where there's doubt there's always hope. We'll leave it at that."

"But—but, Johnny, do you understand about the experiment?"

"Yes, all but one thing."

"And that?"

"What can have stampeded you into trying it on."

For a moment Marion was rather startled. She had had all along some dim sense of what had happened to her; and her regard for Johnny was so great, her knowledge of what he meant to her as a friend so sure, that, half-frightened, she had surrendered to an impulse to probe to the depths of her feeling for him, in a sort of frantic desire to assure herself that in the end he was not to be so cruelly denied of what she had always honestly wished to give him—her love. It was this that had prompted that startling experiment, and her senses had been on the alert, tuned to catch the slightest thrill that mere physical contact could engender. And nothing had come of it, except a certain knowledge that she could, without any revulsion of feeling whatsoever, state that she was ready to marry him, but that, on the other hand, there was no more excitement in it than if she had offered to play him at tennis. She had, indeed, offered herself in a ready spirit of sacrifice, to atone for her unintentional hurting of him, which was a tribute to the tenderness

of her heart, but proof also that she was really in the midst of an emotional crisis which had stampeded her mind in several directions at once.

He had used the very word, and she realised with something like a shock that it was the peculiarly apt one. It was what actually had occurred to her. But how tell him? How say that for hours now she had been haunted by a pair of blue eyes and a vivid impression of the quick, volcanic personality of the Australian? How could she describe in language the strange stirrings in her soul, the indefinable quickening of her imagination, or be able to state exactly what they presaged and why she had re-acted to them in the way she had done, when she but half knew herself? Impossible! She had a sudden wider vision then, an insight deeper to her heart than any that had yet been given her. To attempt to say anything at all about it would make her look foolish, would wound him, and place an utterly wrong aspect on all that had happened.

So, after a long pause, she replied to his half-expressed question:

"A girl's whim, Johnny; a twist of her romantic mind, the glamour of the summer evening—these are more than enough, surely, to set one wondering and analysing oneself, and to bring one to the thinking of those deep thoughts."

Johnny looked at her for a moment in the penetrating way he had, and then put his hand upon her shoulder:

"That's all right, old sport. I understand. And now to bye-bye!"

He collected the records, took up the gramophone:

"So long. Don't forget you're playing in the match on Saturday. I'll be along with the car in good time. Good night."

"Good night, Johnno. I'll not forget."

As she watched him crossing to the other side of the ravine she murmured to herself:

“ I believe he does understand—more than I do myself ! ”

But when, in the process of undressing some minutes later, she uncovered her shoulder and touched the already blackening mark that David's gripping fingers had made, a quick flush spread over her cheeks and neck, and she turned and addressed her dog, who lay across the doorway looking up at her with his adoring brown eyes :

“ Caveman and Greek, Cæsar—but royal ! Royal as your noble self. Shall I ever see him again ? Shall I ever come to know him, think you ? ” She knelt and took the dog's great head in her lap, and whispered : “ For I want to, Cæsar, I badly want to ! ”

CHAPTER V

REBELLION

THAT same evening, at supper, David said to Jimmy Drake, mate of his schooner "Phantom," and also his very good friend :

" Jimmy, you remember that chap Margesson we ran against in 'Frisco a year or two before the War ? "

Jimmy, a mahogany-faced, hard-bitten sailor of about forty, bluff-shouldered, deep-chested, solid and tough in all his five feet nine of height, looked up from the plate over which he was bent with elbows squared.

" What ? That leather-faced hoodlum that had you shangaied, Dave ? "

" Yes."

" Ay. I remember him all right."

" I ran across him to-day."

Jimmy set down his knife and fork with a clatter, and a smile of delight broke over his face.

" You don't say ! Is his ship in dock ? "

" He lives here."

" By thunder ! that's great, Dave. When do we start fixin' him ? "

David laughed.

" He's fixed."

" What ? You've given him the glad hand already ? "

" This evening—just come back from doing it."

Jimmy took up his knife and fork, and the smile of delight passed from his face.

" Reckon you ain't played the game, Dave. You might have waited and let me join in the merry-go-

round. With him livin' here you had him set, so there wasn't any call to be so blame hasty."

"Sorry, Jimmy," apologised David. "But I took him while I had him. Caught him in his office. He's a great man of business now. Made him drive me out to a quiet spot where I'd intended to thrash him good and plenty. But he showed game, so I relented and just made a nice little free and easy of it at first, in spite of the fact that the beggar fought foul right from the start. He was a pretty simple proposition, though, and I was having an enjoyable time when he suddenly landed a rotten, dirty blow which almost got me groggy. However, I managed to stall him off until I'd pulled round, and then he got what was coming to him."

"H'mph!" growled Jimmy. "I'll bet he was able to walk home."

"Well," laughed David, "he strolled along to his car all right."

"That's just like you, Dave. He put it across you pretty thick, and then when you get your chance you just go and wet-nurse him instead of handing him the bouquets he'd earned."

"Don't you believe it, James. When I'd finished with him he was literally eating dirt, with my foot on the back of his neck. He took a mouthful of humiliation, and I reckon it tasted nastier than any additional blows I could have given him. It was a happy thought of mine to come here. He's off my conscience now. And James, my bucko, we sail day after to-morrow, on the morning's tide. I'll slip up to dad's place to-morrow, spend the day there, and be back aboard in the evening. Lay in what stores you want. It's down under for us now."

Jimmy stared.

"What's got you, Dave? You reckoned to spend at least a week here."

"I've changed my mind, Jimmy," and there was

that in David's tone which brooked of no discussion. Jimmy knew better than to waste words. It was not that it was the voice of his superior officer or employer. David seldom, if ever, had occasion to use that tone to him, for Jimmy never lost sight of his duty in the knowledge that he and David were friends. But the essence of their friendship, cemented by pleasures and dangers shared in many lands and seas, lay in a deep understanding of each other's natures and respect for each other's motives and opinions. Jimmy therefore calmly attacked his plate again, and said: "Righto, Dave."

* * * * *

David paced the deck alone that night before turning in. He could not banish from his mind the face of Marion; and because of that the rebellion which he had experienced earlier in the evening raged more fiercely within him. This rebellion was an old and oft-recurring manifestation of his instinct for absolute freedom: freedom of spirit as well as of body. Always to be "master of his fate, captain of his soul," had been the greatest impulse of his life. He re-acted almost frantically to any hint that the wide earth was not his home, shied like a restive horse from the possibility of surrendering his soul into the hands of man or woman. He had stood, from his early, youthful years, splendidly alone, and had been content; had wandered, and found peace in movement as other men find it in immobility. He was the true nomad. So long as he was free to pitch his tent or strike it just when he willed, he was happy.

And now, not only was he finding it difficult to banish Marion's face from his mind, but he had at intervals pulled himself up in the process of actually wishing he might see the girl again! He was almost in a panic at the very real feeling of loneliness which still persisted in tugging at his heart-strings. The girl

indeed spelt danger ! But although he had decided to fly promptly from it by arranging to sail much sooner than he had intended, he was still uneasy. His mind had paid swift and unbidden excursions into the future, and what it saw there made him hastily bring it back to the present, and the past. He stopped suddenly in his walk, and struck the bulwark rail with his fist.

"The plain truth is, I want to get to know that girl ; and at the same time I don't want myself to be wanting to know her." He resumed his pacing, and his thoughts ran on : "It's all a fool sort of madness. Why in thunder *should* I want to see her, anyway ? I've always been sure of myself until now, and lo ! in the blink of an eyelid, I'm not so sure, and feel lonely. Lonely ! My God ! It's funny. It's not love—how can it be ? And yet here I am actually surprising myself wishing it might be, and painting pictures to myself like a moonstruck school-girl ! "

It was not that he was a woman hater. He had simply been too engrossed in his own way of life ever to spare the sex more than a passing thought. His world had been a world of men, in which he had acquitted himself according to his own virile manhood. Women had come and gone like the flitting of butterflies, and they had counted for little in the great hazards and adventures of his life. He had always been inclined to look with pity on the many strong and self-reliant men whom he had seen tie themselves to a woman's apron-string, and sell their fierce independence for the prize of love. Marriage meant home ties, being rooted in one place, submitting to the whims and caprices and the proprietorship of another person : bartering one's ego for a doubtful share in a weaker one. Of course he had it all wrong, but he had it according to the light that was in him. In his curt, vivid thoughts on the subject, he had decided that love would have to

be a greater thing than he had yet seen it to be if it was worth the price of his freedom and individuality.

He eventually turned in, but not at first to sleep. In the deep blackness that enveloped his senses when his eyes were closed there swam the face of the girl, warm, palpitating with life, her rich beauty glowing against the velvet darkness like a cameo. He lay still, absorbed in this strange phenomenon of watching with his mind's eye a portrait of the memory, until vision, all consciousness, all knowledge ended as he slipped into the oblivion of sleep.

He awoke to the new day quick with health and vitality, and very much interested in himself, deliberately bent upon a process of self-analysis. He did not go far with it, for before he had finished shaving he started out of a day-dream in which the girl was the chief figure.

"That certainly settles it, Dave, my boy," he grinned to his reflection in the glass. "We'd sail to-day if I didn't so much want to see dad's old home."

He paid his visit, and saw for the first time the wild Umbrian moors on the fringe of which the village was set. Had the urge in him to get away not been so strong, he would have been glad to have spent a few days in the neighbourhood, for the great rolling heathland with its distant background of hills appealed strongly to his love of space and wide horizons. He found the house in which his father had been born, made himself known to the kindly people who now dwelt therein, and was allowed to enter and visit every room. They made him welcome with true northern hospitality, and pressed him to stay with them overnight, an invitation which he was very loath to refuse.

"Confound that girl!" he muttered as he left the house; and that night after he had gone to his bunk he confounded her still more, for once again she rose in the darkness to trouble his rest. He tossed about,

fighting with a sneaking desire to surrender himself to thoughts of her. At last he got up, poured himself a stiff tot of whiskey, and drank it at a gulp. Within five minutes his peace of mind was restored, for he lay sleeping like a cherub.

About seven o'clock next morning the "Phantom" put to sea. The day was warm and sunny, with just sufficient breeze to fan the schooner along at a gentle three knots. David himself took the wheel. Jimmy had gone below as soon as they were fairly under weigh.

The sea was calm, with a slow heave that was barely perceptible at any distance. David hugged the shore, and in a landward tack about three miles down came abreast of the Hills of Love. The near view of them set him thinking of Margesson and wondering how he was feeling; and it was natural that thoughts of the Mayor should at once bring the girl to mind. He caught himself up with a gesture of impatience, and then put the wheel over to bring the schooner about. At this moment there was a shout from forward, followed by a feminine cry of: "Schooner ahoy!" somewhere on the starboard bow. As the ship came into the wind David saw a woman swimmer, who until then had been hidden from his view by the mainsail, vigorously treading water some twenty yards away. She was waving one arm, and her cry came pealing across to him: "Can you take me aboard?"

"Fling her a line!" shouted David, and then called one of the hands to take the wheel. He ran to the waist of the ship and leaned over the bulwark as a sailor deftly threw a rope within a couple of yards of the swimmer, who, in a single quick stroke, reached and seized it almost as it struck.

"By thunder! It's the girl!" said David to himself. He jumped and took the line from the sailor, and a feeling of exultation surged within him, followed on the instant by a stern effort at repression—but he never ceased pulling gently on the rope.

"Sling the Jacob's ladder overside," he said to the near-by sailor, and then very carefully guided Marion, for she it certainly was, beneath it. She was by no means spent, for of her own strength she nimbly hauled herself out of the water and began climbing up the ship's side.

"Here!" said David swiftly to the sailor: "slip down to my cabin and bring my reefer coat. And you others, hike! lay on that mainsail, and look alive!"

David was thus standing alone when Marion came over the bulwark. She stood poised on the rail, like a goddess in her close-fitting bathing suit, the most wonderfully feminine thing he had ever looked upon.

"Don't stand staring there," she said sharply as she leaped down upon the deck; "get me a wrap, an overcoat—anything!"

David spun round like a shot, and dived for the companion just as the sailor was emerging from it. He seized the coat—a three-quarter length jacket in blue cloth—walked swiftly back to Marion and helped her into it without a word.

"Thanks so much," she smiled sweetly. "It was good of you to have thought of it before I asked. I'm sorry I spoke so sharply."

She flung the reefer about her slender body. It reached to her knees, and her hands were lost in the long sleeves. Then she leaned against the bulwark, glowing like a rose, fresh and sweet as a May morning, and smiled once more on David. And in that moment his fate was sealed, his fight was over, though he was not to realise it just then.

"So it's you?" Marion said. "How funny we should meet again after all! And you are a sailor?"

"That, among other things. I own this ship."

She looked interested.

"She's a sweet little vessel—more like a yacht than a trading schooner."

"I use her like that—she takes me about from place

to place. Trading's only a secondary interest. Sometimes we trade, sometimes we don't."

She heaved a sigh of relief.

"Oh, then, time, as the agreements say, is not to you the essence of the contract? I'm glad, for I would like you to set me ashore at that cove yonder, and have been wondering how I dare have the cheek to ask you to do it."

"What was the trouble—fear of cramp?" asked David, not answering her implied request. "You didn't seem to be in any difficulty."

"But I was, though I had plenty of strength left. There's a strong current out here when the tide is on the ebb, and I'd come a little too far. When I turned to swim back I found myself in the grip of the current, and could make no headway at all—in fact, I was being carried out to sea no matter how hard I swam. I saw you coasting along, and so saved my strength to intercept you."

"It would be no trouble to put you ashore in the dinghy," said David. "I'll have it lowered at once."

He called to Jimmy Drake, who had just come up on deck:

"Jimmy, heave the ship to, and have the dinghy lowered. And say, old son, be careful of your eyes, or they'll be popping on to your cheeks in a moment. We've just fished this lady out of the water, and I want you to take her across to that cove yonder and set her ashore."

Jimmy grinned delightedly.

"Right, Dave—I mean, ay, ay, sir!"

He turned away in great glee to do David's bidding. David himself took a turn up and down the deck, while Marion looked amusedly at him.

"Do you always allow your subordinates to address you by your Christian name," she asked, "or are you only a figure-head sort of captain?"

David stopped in his pacing, and gazed fixedly at her.

"Ask him—the mate—while he's rowing you ashore. He'll tell you what sort of a captain I am."

He resumed his striding up and down, a set look upon his face; and he was thinking:

"What a witch she is, and how she tugs at something within me! It seems like fate. Dave, I'm thinking you'll buck the wrong card if you run away. This girl's worth while."

Marion continued to watch him thoughtfully, noting his quick, lithe stride, his firm way of setting his feet on the deck, and was unmoved at the keen glances he gave her as he wheeled about in his movement to and fro.

"You seem pre-occupied," she said.

"I am," he replied, rather grimly.

"I hope it's not because you have to interrupt your voyage to set me ashore."

"I said it would be no trouble," he answered shortly.

She knitted her brows.

"You are peculiar—what's set you pacing before me like this? You—you resemble a caged tiger!"

There was just a faint note of indignation in her voice. He stopped abruptly.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but if I'd gone away to another part of the deck to do my pacing, I'd have been rude instead of merely peculiar." A smile played about his lips. "I feel like anything but a caged tiger—more like a bird in the snare; but you won't understand that."

At this moment Jimmy came bustling up.

"The dinghy's ready, Miss."

David swung round.

"Right, Jimmy, I've decided to row the lady ashore myself."

The look of chagrin that came over Jimmy's face at this news was comical; and then he grew sarcastic.

" You change your mind frequent these days, Dave. Seems to be goin' back on you."

" It is causing me some trouble, Jimmy," answered David coolly, chuckling at Jimmy's discomfiture. He turned to Marion: " Ready, Miss? "

She nodded. The dinghy had been pulled alongside the Jacob's ladder. Marion quickly descended and took her seat in the stern. David followed and pushed off, and began to row in the direction of the cove. Marion sat with bare feet and legs tucked under her.

" Why *did* you change your mind? " she asked David as soon as they were well away from the schooner.

He smiled, and went steadily on with his rowing.

" For a reason I could not have had two days ago," he answered.

" That's no explanation," she replied.

" I know it isn't," he said calmly.

" I suppose you think I oughtn't to have asked that question," Marion said defiantly. " I suppose you think me rudely inquisitive! "

" No—rather charmingly so."

This made her laugh.

" Thanks! And you are as charmingly candid—and not nearly such a terrible man as you seemed the other evening."

" No," said David ironically, " I'm really a perfect saint, without the halo! "

" I don't think the Mayor of Bede would agree to that," she laughed. " I suppose you knew he was our Mayor? "

" Yes."

" Are you running away from him? "

" Oh, quite! " replied David. " He has me scared! As a matter of fact, though, I *was* heading for the South Seas; but when I've put you ashore I'm returning to Bede."

" You've changed your mind once again? "

“That’s it.”

Marion was conscious of a thrill of pleasure. This state of indecision in one who seemed so determined was significant. He hadn’t intended to row her ashore, and then had done so ; before she came on the scene he was at the beginning of a long voyage, and now he was going back to Bede—she herself must, therefore, be the cause ! That there was also something else he had changed his mind about was evident from the reproving remark of the mate’s. Could it be that she was the cause of that too ? Anyhow, her wish had been granted, and she was to see more of this young man.

She sat silent for a little while, and stared out across the sea with a thoughtful expression on her face. David watched her as he leisurely bent to his rowing, studied her profile, the graceful poise of her head in its bright-coloured bathing cap, the rich curve of her neck and shoulders. And every moment he felt less impelled to rebellion, more at ease with his philosophic doubts, gladly resigned to the interposition of that chance which had brought him so far to thrust him at last into the maze of love’s adventure. Beauty the girl had, but that alone would never have satisfied him. There was soul, mind, quality, in the expression, the carriage, the very body of her. And so he rowed on, heedless of time and place, and noting little how the set of the current was carrying the boat southwards away from the point at which he was to set Marion ashore. She presently reminded him.

“Oh, I say, row harder, please. We’ll never hit the cove at this rate ; and I’ve to be at work at half-past nine.”

David gave a hasty glance round, and then began to row more vigorously, saying :

“We’ll creep up quickly as soon as we get into the slack nearer shore.”

He eased the dinghy about until she was cutting

more diagonally across the current, and with each mighty tug at the oars he almost lifted the boat out of the water. He continued drily :

"Don't be severe on me for day-dreaming ; for if we hadn't happened along, you know, it's doubtful whether you'd have ever got to work again ! "

She flushed slightly.

"Oh ! I wasn't *feeling* such an ungrateful little beast as my words implied. I spoke unthinkingly. I'm really concerned at the trouble I've had to put you to. But as for being in any danger, I could have floated and swum with the current for hours. Without boasting about it, I might say I'm an almost tireless swimmer. It never occurred to me to think you had saved me from drowning ; but perhaps you did, and I deserve your rebuke." She hung her head and seemed genuinely distressed ; and then she amazed him by saying : " Women are horribly selfish things, and I do feel a beast. Row as slowly as you like. Work can hang."

His reply was an indulgent smile, and an extra spurt at the oars ; and again there was silence between them. He appeared to be meditating something, and they kept stealing interested glances at one another. They had got out of the current and were making rapid progress towards the shore when David suddenly spoke :

"In case you should want to write and thank me, my name is David Grant."

Marion gave him a quick, surprised look, and for an instant a light of pleasure flashed in her eyes. She smiled demurely.

"Is it ? It's a better name than John Smith, or Marmaduke Popjoy ! And I fully intend to thank you before I leave the boat."

He was in no wise chagrined at this evasive reply.

"Of course you see I want to know your name. It makes no difference whether you tell it me now or

leave me to find it out. I'm going to see you again. I haven't changed my mind twice in the last half-hour for nothing."

"But how terrible if you should!" she taunted him. "I think you must be one of those tremendous men who always know what they want and see that they get it: 'What I want I take' kind of men. Well, well, my name's in the directory, sir. You can consult one at the Public Library. And I spend my nights alone during summer in that bungalow which stands furthest down the ravine yonder. What a mercy this isn't the wilds of Canada!"

Laughter was bubbling in her voice and twinkling in her eyes. The light of humour was in his own.

"Josh away, my lady," he said. "I'm fair game, and I know it."

"Yes, you said you were like a bird in the snare," she flashed.

"I'm free again, though, but not quite the same bird. I've suffered a sea change."

"And can quote Shakespeare, though inaptly!" She stood up. They were within fifty yards of the beach, and the little boat was already rising and falling on the combers rolling shoreward. "You need not come any farther—I can swim the rest." She prepared to cast off the coat, and when her right arm was out of the encumbering sleeve she thrust out her hand. He dropped an oar and grasped the slender fingers. "My many thanks, Mr. Grant."

And then, like a ripple of light, she was over the side and swimming to the shore with swift strokes which carried her along at a great pace. David rested on his oars and watched her. When she had reached shallow water she rose to her feet, faced about, and making a hollow of her hands called out:

"It's my father's name that's in the directory: but my friends call me Marion!"

With a wave of the hand she dashed out of the water

and ran swiftly up the sandy beach to the mouth of the ravine, where she picked up a bathing wrap and flung it about her. David sat motionless at his oars until she reached her bungalow. On the steps she paused, once again waved to him, and then passed from his view. He remained a little while longer, scanning the cove and the ravine, and then turned the boat about and rowed back to the schooner. Jimmy Drake was leaning over the rail, and grinned cheerfully at him as he climbed the Jacob's ladder and stepped to the deck.

"Get the dinghy aboard," David cried to a couple of the hands. He then turned to Jimmy: "And James, my bucko, we are returning to Bede."

The grin died from Jimmy's lips. He gazed anxiously at David.

"Returning to Bede? Forgot something?"

"Not that I remember," answered David, a light of mischief dancing in his eyes.

Jimmy looked puzzled.

"Then what in hell's the matter with you, Dave? You're actin' queer. Not feelin' well?" He looked keenly into David's face and eyes. "No, that ain't it. You're jumpin' fit. Something happened about that girl? She looked all right."

David laughed, leaned against the rail with folded arms, and enjoyed Jimmy's mystification.

"She swam the last fifty yards at something over four knots, so I'd say she *was* all right."

Jimmy sighed, pushed his peaked cap back and scratched his head.

"Why then," he said in injured tones, "if you ain't tellin', I'd better be gettin' the ship about." He was on the point of turning away when he suddenly knitted his brows and gazed at David with an appealing, almost frightened look: "Don't—don't say that girl's knocked you sideways, Dave!"

David grinned.

"I *am* rather interested in her, Jimmy."

Jimmy stared unbelievably, and then shook his head.

"No, you're joshin'."

"I'm dead serious, Jimmy."

"I won't believe it. It's your liver or something. You've seen 'em just as pretty and with no more on, and never looked twice!"

"She saw the fight. I never told you. Funny we should run across her like this."

"Dam funny," said Jimmy in disgust. Then he looked at David much as an elder brother, wise in the ways of the world, might have done.

"There's still time to change your mind again, Dave. You've just about boxed the compass already, so another swing o' the needle won't do any harm. I'm speakin' seriously, and not wantin' to butt in, Dave; but it seems to me you're actin' hasty-like. Take my advice and keep on runnin' away, as I see now you were doing until we hauled that girl out of the water. If you take another dose of the poison you're a gone coon. It isn't as if you were one o' these pretty-pretty lads who have a new girl every time they put on a clean shirt. You're as ignorant of women as Adam was before Eve walked over his cabbage patch. If a girl once gets her hooks into you you can say good-bye-ee to the kind of life you've led and which you've said often enough you wouldn't change for any other. Don't let 'em get the chance to grab you, Dave. You're a fine, upstandin' man and naturally they all want to sling a half-hitch about you—oh, thunder, what's the good o' talkin'. You're just standing there laughin' at me."

"You've sure spoken a mouthful, as the American said. And you might have saved yourself the trouble, Jimmy. This girl's different——"

"Ay, they're all different, until you marry 'em!"

David laughed outright at this piece of cynicism,

and the angry, almost savage, way in which Jimmy said it.

"All right, James ! The next time I see Mrs. Drake I'll give you away. Anyhow, it's no use arguing. We are returning to Bede. Later I'll tell you how this girl butted into the fight, and perhaps, if you are good, why I think she's different !"

CHAPTER VI
BLUE EYES OR GREEN

THREE days later, Marion was walking along MacKenzie Street on her way to lunch at a fashionable restaurant at the further end of the thoroughfare, when she was hailed by Johnny Cossar, who had seen her approaching from his office window. He had been debating within himself whether to lunch at the Club—the same club of which Margesson was a member—or at the very place for which Marion was making. He came hastily out from his chambers as she appeared by the doorway.

"Whither away, fair maid?" he greeted her.

"To lunch at 'The Meldon,' Johnny."

"Ah! That saves me the trouble of making up my mind. May I join you?"

"Of course. What were you hesitating about?"

"Lunch at the Club or lunch at 'The Meldon.' 'The Meldon' is gayer, and the music delightful: one's æsthetic sense is tickled at the expense of one's palate. With the Club it's the reverse—solemn and ceremonial as a cathedral service, but the grub is twenty-two carat and the cooking a sheer work of art. As a rule I never hesitate; grub always beats music out of the field; but to-day I felt less gross, more ethereal——"

"You look it, Johnny," laughed Marion; "positively diaphanous! Well, come along. I'm brutally hungry myself."

In the restaurant they found a corner table from which most of the room could be surveyed. Johnny had just given the order for their lunch when

the revolving doors at the entrance swung round, and a man issued into the dining-hall. He strolled leisurely and with an almost arrogant air up the centre aisle, and his eyes roved deliberately about from left to right as he scanned the tables and their occupants.

"Hullo, hullo!" said Johnny, "here's our worthy Mayor, looking more than ever like Alexander of old when he found there wasn't another world to conquer. I wonder what's set him here? I've always thought that wild horses wouldn't stop him from lunching at the Club—our Club. He haunts the place. Can it be that he and I are thinking alike to-day? Two great minds with but—oh, damn,—beg pardon, Marion!—but he's coming over to us."

Margesson had not been able to repress a start when he saw Marion. The next moment he was moving with his former deliberation towards their table, and his green eyes were fixed unwaveringly on her. He never shifted his gaze until he stood before them. He turned to Johnny.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Cossar."

"Good morning, Mr. Margesson," said Johnny curtly: "it's never afternoon with me until I've had lunch."

"Ah, no, one feels that way," said the Mayor urbanely, his eyes straying again in the direction of Marion. "You are not lunching at the Club?"

"As you see."

Margesson smiled, and gave another meaning glance at Marion. "The food is better at the Club," he went on to Johnny, "but sometimes one wishes to lose one's identity in the general crowd; a club is, well—a club; a sort of family. Er—are you not going to introduce me to this young lady?"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" thought Johnny, as he turned to Marion enquiringly. She nodded, and Johnny made the introduction, wondering at her acquiescence.

"Fay?" echoed Margesson as he bowed a trifle extravagantly. "Not William Fay the shipbuilder's daughter?"

"The same," answered Marion.

"I'm charmed," said Margesson, smiling and showing a mouthful of white teeth which gleamed in his dark face. "He and I are negotiating big business just now. This is indeed a pleasant surprise. May I join you at lunch?"

Johnny kicked Marion's foot beneath the table; but she ignored the urgent message. She was intrigued with the situation, and wanted to see how this man would comport himself before her with the memory of his former plight still vivid in his mind. She smiled and said:

"Certainly, Mr. Margesson," and then scanned his face as he thanked her and prepared to sit down. He bore no marks of the fight except for a small cut on his cheek; but she noticed that one of his hands was still swollen. He saw her looking at it, and far from trying to hide it held up his fist, turning it about and gazing critically at the swollen knuckles. He then glanced at her, and smiled.

"I've been wondering ever since that evening what you thought about it all, Miss Fay. It must have seemed pretty brutal to you—like a common brawl."

"Oh, no," Marion answered coolly, at once resenting the implication against David; "not brutal, nor anything like a brawl; at least not when I understood. I admired your opponent's magnificent strength and skill, and his wonderful restraint. He only boxed your ears, when he could have struck you senseless."

Margesson drew down his brows in a quick frown, and then a smile twisted his thin lips.

"Yes, I must admit you are right. He was too big and strong for me. Still, I think your timely intervention saved me from further punishment, and I want to thank you for it."

"It was purely disinterested," said Marion. "I've thought since that perhaps you deserved that further punishment, Mr. Margesson."

Marion was rapidly making up her mind that she did not like the Mayor. He, on his part, was having great difficulty in disguising his chagrin at the attitude she had taken up, but managed with an almost obvious effort to preserve a dignified demeanour.

"Ah, I see my friend the Australian has gained a champion in you. He is fortunate. Haven't you anything to say for the poor vanquished? I didn't at first cut such an ignoble figure."

"Perhaps not. I never saw you. But it's obvious you did some ignoble thing to call down your opponent's vengeance!"

"You believed in what he said, then?"

"His words on the face of them carried truth: your position when I intervened proved them."

The arrival of the soup at this moment interrupted the conversation, and Margesson could only make a gesture of resignation. Johnny had in the meanwhile sat and listened amazedly, and in his mind was a great enlightenment. He now seized the opportunity to enquire:

"May I ask when this fight took place?"

"Five evenings ago," said Marion, without looking at him, but with just the suspicion of a flush suffusing her cheek.

"Ah!" said Johnny quietly; and Marion knew that the exclamation signified his complete understanding.

Margesson did not speak again until he had finished his soup.

"Of course," he resumed, as he idly crumbled the roll on his plate, "it must be a matter of indifference to you, Miss Fay, but I'd like you to hear both sides. I really think you should give me a chance to justify myself."

Marion couldn't see why she really should do any-

thing at all of the kind ; and his continued harping on the subject irritated her. She suddenly determined to be brutally truthful, and then perhaps he would find something else to talk about.

" He boxed your ears," she said quietly ; " he made you eat dirt. Any man of spirit would have fought back until he dropped. How can you possibly justify yourself ? The best thing would be to try and forget it."

A flush came into the cheeks of Margesson. The antagonism of the girl was plain ; her preconceptions fixed and apparently immovable. To a less complacent egoist than he the advice of Marion would have seemed wise and suggestive. But already he was thinking that here at last was the wife for him : beautiful, cultured, charming, with irreproachable connections and of sound social standing. The Fays, he well knew, moved in the most select circles of the district. They were a family of great business traditions, and for upwards of a hundred and fifty years there had always been a Fay engaged in the building or owning of ships in Bede. To marry into this family would be to put the coping stone upon the edifice of success he had erected. Therefore he persisted in trying to impose his point of view upon Marion.

" At least I can try to justify myself," he said, with an assumption of humility. " It was a lamentable business at the best. A man of my civic responsibilities does not light-heartedly engage in an affair of that sort. To fight like navvies is not the past-time of cultured men. But it was the outcome of a grudge upon the part of my opponent. He had cherished hatred of me for a long time—some trifling hurt I'd unwittingly done him years ago. I'd forgotten all about it, but he hadn't. He accidentally came upon me that day and forced the fight. I didn't back out, as I justifiably could have done. I preferred to run the risk of being seen, with the consequent damaging

effect on my position and name, rather than let him taunt me with cowardice. So much for that. As for the fight, and the thing he told you I did to him, I do assure you he seized upon it to gratify his lust of vengeance. It was an accident. I slipped, and struck him lower down than the laws of sportsmanship and decency allow. He saw me slip—couldn't fail to see that the blow was unintentional; but he deliberately gave you a wrong impression. As for fighting back, God knows I did it to the utmost of my power. But I was beaten down. He was too strong, too big for me. If he were here he would tell you I fought back until I was half conscious. I'm no coward. He'd tell you that, too."

"Perhaps he will. I shall ask him!"

At these words Margesson started violently.

"What's that you say?" he asked harshly. "You'll ask him? Have you come to know him, then?"

"He rescued me from drowning three days ago."

A dark scowl settled on Margesson's face, and for a moment he seemed to control himself with difficulty; then he forced a smile to his lips, and said smoothly:

"Curse him! the lucky dog. I'd have given a thousand years of Paradise for the opportunity—wouldn't you, Mr. Cossar?"

"No, I wouldn't," replied Johnny bluntly. He had an intense dislike of Margesson, and he further considered this speech and much of what had gone before in the most execrable taste.

"And why?" asked Margesson.

"Because it's not my habit either to think or speak in capital letters."

"You aren't very courteous to the lady, my friend," said Margesson.

"I'm sincere, at all events," said Johnny, "and Miss Fay and I are old friends enough to understand one another. She knows what I would have given for

the opportunity. And speaking of courtesy, do you think it good taste to talk the way you do? To put it bluntly, you embarrass Miss Fay."

Margesson sneered at Johnny, and turned to Marion.
"Is that true?"

Marion was indeed looking uncomfortable, and she was beginning to regret having consented to the introduction. Margesson's extravagant speech, his attitude when he made it, and the whole implication behind his manner and his words, following on such a short acquaintanceship, were more than embarrassing. She answered him coldly:

"Your question only adds to the offence, Mr. Margesson."

But his complacency was armour-proof against even this rebuff. He smiled!

"I'm sorry indeed. It was far from my desire to offend you. I wish you could see that it was only my eagerness to stand well in your eyes and chagrin at the Australian's luck." He stood up. "You will excuse me, I know; but my continued presence will only further embarrass you. I shall go. And I hope that as our acquaintanceship ripens you will come to understand me better."

Saying which he reached to the stand for his hat and walked out of the restaurant without another word to either Marion or Johnny. Johnny turned to her, and grinned:

"Phew! For this relief much thanks. I'll begin to enjoy my lunch now."

Two little puckers had gathered on Marion's brow.

"I'm sorry, Johnno. It was my fault. I shouldn't have consented to the introduction." She was silent a moment. "Did you notice his last remark? 'As our acquaintanceship ripens!' He seems pretty certain it will!" She shuddered involuntarily. "I'm afraid of that man. His green eyes give me the creeps."

"Don't let the colour of his eyes upset you. I

expect it's the bile in him that turned them green. And his acquaintance with you can only ripen if you allow it."

"But if he's negotiating big business with dad it's more than likely we'll see him at our house presently, and that'll be his opportunity. If I'm any judge of a face he'll not let the chance slip."

"I don't suppose you are any judge, dear—at least you oughtn't to be: not of his type of face, anyhow. Don't bother yourself about him. He's a bluffer, a poseur, drunk with his sudden rise to power. I'm more interested in this other chap. Let's have the story."

"There isn't any story—only this," laughed Marion. And briefly she related the tale of her encounters with David. Johnny listened with grave attention. Marion finished by saying: "And he's got blue eyes, Johnno. So please out of your infinite wisdom pronounce judgment. Blue eyes or green—which will be the more dangerous?"

Johnny hunched his shoulders.

"I shouldn't dare to read your horoscope, Marion. But haven't you forgotten the other colour?"

"How?" she asked, a trifle puzzled.

"My eyes are grey."

Her face softened, and she stretched out a hand across the table and lightly pressed his.

"Ah, yes!" she said gently. "I wonder which it will be? I wish it could be grey, Johnno; I do wish it."

"But you're half afraid it will be blue, eh?" he answered with characteristic light-heartedness. "I see I shall have to kill that man. 'Blue eyes' is indeed dangerous—but only to me!"

Marion smiled constrainedly, and went on with her lunch in silence. In her mind was a vision of David, and she wondered whether Johnny was wholly right. Her experience of men held nothing by which to

compare the Australian. He was something new and strange: a personality bound by no creed or convention; splendid in his manhood, but with a wild, untameable spirit slumbering behind his keen, humorous eyes. Might he not spell danger for her? Not moral danger, certainly; but she felt herself coming more and more under the spell of her memories of him. Her imagination was afire. She admitted it to herself. The beckoning finger of Romance was luring her, half-eager, half-unwilling, down strange, delectable pathways of thought. This man was the unknown, striding into her life from the wild, unknown places of the world, an imperious, mastering figure that held her fascinated. On the other hand, all the instincts of her conventional upbringing were at work to impel her to a more critical estimate of him, to place him in his true position in relation to the gentle, refining influences under which her character had been moulded and set. He did not fit into her world. But, she told herself, it would be good, it would be thrilling and adventurous, to step outside that world and take for a while whatever the gods of chance had a mind to send her. Her woman's heart, nevertheless, was full of pity for Johnny, and the wish she had expressed was as sincere as had been her offering of herself to him on that evening when she had first met David. She saw beneath Johnny's half-jocular manner, and realised somewhat the apprehension which he must be feeling that in "Blue Eyes," as he had named him, was the end of all his hopes.

CHAPTER VII
A MOVE IN THE GAME

MARGESSON left the restaurant outwardly calm, and seemingly master of himself and the situation; but within him there raged a mounting hatred of the Australian. This was his first day abroad since the fight, and during the period of his enforced confinement within the house he had broodingly nursed his wrongs at the hands of David. For days his face had been an affront to him every time he caught sight of its reflection in a mirror, and any movement of its muscles brought him pain. To eat was an almost intolerable discomfit; to yawn an agony. Once he had sneezed, and thereafter went in mortal dread of a repetition of the act, so painful had the consequences been. His misery at first was total and abject. The covert glances of his servants, their wondering looks, irritated him. The memory of his deep humiliation in that final scene, when David had ground his face into the earth, and of the sorry figure he had cut before the girl, had been ever-present in his mind, and weighed heavily on his vanity. And now, as if all that had not been enough, the long-legged devil must needs come once more across his path to thwart and defeat him!

As Margesson walked along MacKenzie Street he cursed David and his luck. He did not know how the Australian's acquaintance with Marion was likely to develop, but already it seemed that he was well established in her good graces, and were he attracted by her he would be a most formidable rival. But it was not yet necessary to assume that. Grant was for the

moment merely a disturbing factor in the situation, inasmuch as his rescue of Marion had prejudiced her attitude towards himself. Margesson rather bitterly realised that his manner in the restaurant had rather deepened that prejudice; but what man in like circumstances could have dissembled his mortification? Well, he must scheme to nullify the bad impression he had created. That should be easy enough, he assured himself in his egregious conceit. But it did not lessen his hostility to David. The indignities and humiliation he had suffered cried out for redress, and when he had learnt from Marion that his enemy was still in port, he had at once determined that redressed they should be. He did not, quite illogically, conceive that he had deserved them, nor that the balance was now just. The balance would never be just so long as his was not the triumphing arm. Therein lay the essence of the man's nature: his utter inability to submit to mastery, the itch always to get even, to be top dog. The cautious and more circumspect side of him was already urging that he was really a fool to think of continuing the feud, that he ought to be content to let well alone, and be glad that he had got off so easily; that for one in his position and with his social ambitions it was in the highest degree imprudent to implicate himself in any such shady work as he contemplated. But when this other self of his was sufficiently stirred, as it was now, no promptings of caution, no formula of expediency, were ever vigorous or logical enough to turn him from an attempt to level the score. It was a twist in his character which had more than once brought him into difficulties; but so inordinate was his self-esteem, so devoid was he of any gift of self-analysis, that he never learnt the lesson those difficulties should have taught him.

Physical violence, summary and brutal, on the body of David was what he now schemed to achieve. To have his enemy writhe and wilt under an atrocious

beating, and to know that that arrogant splendour of strength and vitality was beaten to the dust, and the smiling, mocking face ground there as his own had been—this he wanted, and for the moment nothing more. The job would have to be done vicariously, but so long as it was done, so long as his own hurts were avenged by the infliction of similar ones upon the hated Australian, it did not matter a jot whose was the hand that dealt them.

He knew the very man for the work. There would be no difficulty in keeping his own identity secret. To affect an efficient disguise would be simple. A false moustache, a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, a stoop, a thickening of his voice, and the trick was done! It will be seen that Margesson had a melodramatic turn of mind, which is far enough from saying it was an imaginative one. His Tree of Achievement was a manifestation of this trait; so was his sudden determination to marry Marion, and his "shangai-ing" of David in those by-gone years and his boosting of him on to the lonely Pacific island. In the colourless, grasping, calculating soul of him there had been mixed a tincture of that red blood which fills some men's lives with the glory of quixotic endeavour, or sets them out upon the wanderpath, or causes them to revolt totally and drastically from the humdrum, ordered tenor of their lives. In Margesson, it only became active when his vanity or his pocket were touched, and impelled him to acts of vengeance or reprisal, which were always conceived in the vein of transpontine melodrama.

In this matter of his disguise he went to infinite pains—bought and chose his moustache as though he were intending to make up for some private theatricals; selected a pair of spectacles resembling motor goggles; went home and practised his stoop before the mirror, and talked to his reflection in a voice so deep that it vibrated as much in his stomach as in his chest,

and made his throat ache. Satisfied that his own mother would not have recognised him, he issued forth at nightfall, moustache and spectacles in his pocket, walked into town and spent a few minutes at his club. Then he set off for the unsavoury quarter of the dock-land, making his way thence by unfrequented side-streets. It was a district familiar enough to him. His boyhood had been spent amidst its scenes of squalid picturesqueness, its atmosphere of ships and sailormen, its narrow alleys and hole-and-corner taverns, its warehouses and shabby tenemented dwellings, once the abode of ships' captains and prosperous merchantmen.

His destination was a public house in the main thoroughfare which led from the docks, and before he came out into the well-lit street he stopped at the corner of a dark alley and put on his spectacles and moustache ; and then, with a chuckle of satisfaction, he came forth beneath the lamps, stooping in the manner he had practised, and setting his hands deeply into the pockets of his jacket. He felt elated at his cleverness, at the thought of his meditated revenge, and actually laughed within himself to think that he, the chief citizen of the town, a man of substance, respected among his fellows, should be engaged in such nefarious work. He thought it a huge joke, and the thought was the measure of his mind.

The tavern he sought was situated in a narrow cul-de-sac which abutted on the main thoroughfare close to the dock-gates, and was one of the oldest drinking shops in the town. It was the haunt of seamen, of dock-side touts, of the harpies who prey upon the sailor. At any time you could find at its bar, or seated by its oilcloth-covered tables, men of many nationalities : Lascars, Japs, Swedes, Dutchmen ; an occasional negro, keelmen from upriver, stevedores, coal-heavers ; a tough and hard-bitten crowd such as only a big seaport can show.

Margesson entered the bar, and stood unnoticed at the counter, waiting patiently until the barman came his way. When he did so Margesson beckoned the man close and whispered :

“ Is ‘ The Bishop ’ about ? ”

The barman looked surprised, gave Margesson a quick glance, and then carelessly nodded his head in the direction of the sitting-room.

“ He was in there a few minutes ago.”

Margesson moved over to the door and passed within. His eye roved over the mixed company, and fastened at once upon a man sitting in a far corner, moodily drinking alone. Margesson made his way across the room and sat down opposite the man. He was a thick-set fellow of medium height, dressed in neat pea-cloth. On his face was an alert, cunning, appraising look, as of one who is ready to take anybody’s measure at an instant’s notice : card-sharpers, confidence-tricksters, commercial travellers—men who live by their wits, have this look.

Margesson, whose wide experience of the dock-land included its underworld, knew the man as a trafficker in a dozen shady employments, one whose activities ranged from the drugging of a sailor’s beer and the robbing of him, to the running of a doss-house which was in reality a brothel. His real name was Jacob Priest—hence his soubriquet “ The Bishop.”

Margesson said to him with studied suavity :

“ Good evening ! ”

The man moved a pair of bushy eyebrows with a quick, snappy motion, and fastened his cold, grey eyes on the Mayor.

“ Good evening,” he said curtly, and took up his glass and drained it.

Margesson rang the bell on the table, and waited in silence until the barman came.

“ Repeat this gentleman’s drink, and bring me a large whiskey and soda, please.”

"The Bishop" leaned back in his seat.

"You know your way about, stranger."

"I should," replied Margesson, smiling.

"I've seen men like you," went on "The Bishop," "but I've never seen you before."

"I know you haven't," answered Margesson, exulting within himself at this tribute to the effectiveness of his disguise, for the man would have known him at once without it.

"But you know me," said the man harshly. "You came straight at me. I don't like people who do that. I've no use for strangers who know me."

"Are you afraid of them?" asked Margesson coolly. "Be easy, my friend. I only come to ask you to do me a service, for which I shall handsomely pay you."

Suspicion still lingered in "The Bishop's" eyes.

"How do you know I can do you a service? What made you single me out?"

"I was recommended to you," lied Margesson.

"The Bishop" stared fixedly at the Mayor for some moments.

"Well?" he said at last, "what is it you want?"

"This," answered Margesson: and he leaned over and began to speak in low tones.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MOVE FAILS

ONCE having made his decision that single blessedness with its attendant freedom was not necessarily the only state in which a man might achieve a worthy destiny, it was characteristic of David to plunge with energy and directness into the business of getting to know Marion. He said to himself :

“ She gave me her address, she told me half her name—evidently she wishes me to go along and find out the other half. And I’m not wasting any time ! ”

He certainly did not, for after once more docking the schooner and snugging her down for a lengthy stay, he made up his mind to go visiting that very evening. When he arrived at Marion’s bungalow he found it deserted. At first he had a half notion of waiting, and strolled up and down the ravine for a little while ; but the curious stares of some people sitting on the verandah of a dwelling near Marion’s drove the idea from his mind. He paid another visit the following evening, with the same result. In nowise daunted, he grinned as he turned away, and muttered :

“ I’ll bet she’s somewhere in town, chuckling to herself. Perhaps to-morrow she’ll be at home. But I’m not coming to-morrow. Looks as though she was still joshin’.”

He had conceived the idea that he was acting too precipitatedly, without delicacy.

“ I’ve got to let her get used to the notion that I’m wanting to see her again. She’s certainly not one of those kind that take up with a chap easily. I’d hate

her to be like that. It's no use trying to stampede her."

Quite convinced that he was right, and feeling a pride in his diplomacy which was really naïve in one who was so much a man of the world among men, he decided to wait at least a week before again seeking out Marion. During this time he spent the days in wandering in his quick, vital way up and down the town, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by Jimmy Drake, poking his nose into the taverns of the dock-land, dining in state at "The Meldon," hobnobbing with sailormen, policemen, wharfingers, dock-rats—"tasting the place," as he put it, and finding it very attractive to his palate.

It was on the day following Margesson's visit to "The Bishop" that David became aware of being shadowed. As he left the ship that morning and made his way along the dock-side he noticed two heavily-built, rough-looking men standing by one of the many timber-stacks set up on the wharves. The men seemed particularly interested in him. Later in the day he ran across them lounging outside a tavern from which he issued in the company of the mate. He drew Jimmy's attention to them.

"Those two stiffs are looking for trouble, Jimmy. That's the second time I've noticed them to-day."

Jimmy eyed them belligerently.

"What about giving them a rough-house right away, Dave?" But before David could reply the two men had turned hastily about and slunk off. "H'mph!" grunted Jimmy, "d'ye think that hoodlum of a Mayor set them on?"

"Shouldn't wonder," said David carelessly, "though it's more likely they're on a game of their own. But keep your eyes skinned when you're coming aboard at night, Jimmy."

* * * * *

Two days later David said to himself: "I'll see her

to-morrow, certain; for I won't go a-visiting—I'll go bathing. She'll not be the one to miss her morning swim, and she'll never expect me around so early."

He went alone to a Cinema that evening, and it tickled him to realise after the show what an absorbed and unwonted interest he had taken in the fortunes of the heroine of the principal picture, and how a rather charmingly portrayed love story had gripped his attention all the way. "I see how it is these novelist fellows can keep on without repeating themselves," he thought as he walked meditatively back to the ship. "There are as many love stories as there are pairs of lovers in the world, and no two are alike. But it must be terribly difficult to make a selection!"

Very dreamily he strolled along the dock-side, heeding nothing but his thoughts. He was thus easy game for the two men who had been shadowing him for the last two days, and whom he had for the moment forgotten. They sprang upon him from behind a stack of timber. One of them hit him a swinging blow on the head, and he staggered to one side, tripped against a bollard, and plunged headlong into the dock. He went under only partly conscious, for the blow had landed on his temple, and a less virile man than he would have been utterly stunned by it. The shock of the cold water restored him to his senses, and when he rose to the surface, gasping, it was with all his faculties alert. From his position where he trod water cautiously, he could make out against the background of sky two figures leaning over the dock-side. They must have seen him at once, for one of them called down:

"Sorry, mate. We didna intend tae droon ye, on'y tae gi'e ye a sluggin'. There's a ladder close by. Can ye clim' oot?"

"I can, my friend," thought David: "and when I'm out, God help you!" Aloud he said, in a voice of

simulated weakness : " I feel a bit groggy. Stand by to give me a hand. Where's the ladder ? "

" Here, mate," said the man, running some ten feet along the wharf. David splashed and puffed his way to it, and very slowly and with much display of weakness drew himself out of the water. The men waited at the top warily. David mounted two or three rungs, and then deliberately slipped off into the dock again. Once more he pulled himself up, a rung at a time. One of the men, seeing his apparent plight, came down to help him. " Thanks," gasped David. " I was nearly off again. The damned ladder's trying to stand on its head." With sagging limbs he allowed himself to be dragged to the top, where the second man, stooping, grabbed him under the arms and assisted him to the dock-side. The instant his feet touched ground David suddenly stiffened, and seized each man by the back of the neck and knocked their heads violently together. Then, holding them at arms' length he said :

" Now, you swabs, who set you on at this game ? "

The men were smitten into silence by the crisp concussion of their heads and by the knowledge that they had been so skilfully duped. They wriggled in his grasp, and then one of them started kicking. The toe of his boot rasped up David's shin. He promptly knocked their heads together again, whereat the one who had constituted himself chief spokesman stuttered hastily :

" It's no use, mate. We aren'a sayin' anything. Get on wi' ye're sluggin', or run's alang tae th' police station. But for the Lord's sake dinna jarp oor heids together again. It's fair torture."

" Your loyalty is misplaced, my friend," answered David, relenting somewhat towards them. " I've a very good idea who employed you. Can you both swim ? "

" No," they answered hastily.

"Be very sure," David insisted. "For it's either a ducking or, as you put it, a slugging."

He tightened his grip until they thought their necks would break.

"We can swim a little piece," they said together.

"Then swim," said David, and he booted them one after the other into the dock. After which he turned away and calmly continued his progress to the ship, and thus failed to notice a furtive figure, in horn-rimmed spectacles and with a dark moustache, issue from the shadow of the timber-stack and shake a fist after his retreating form.

When David had been rowed aboard he went straight to the saloon. Jimmy Drake was playing patience and drinking whiskey. He looked up as David entered, and noted his wet clothes.

"Hullo, Dave, been in the dock?"

"I have, Jimmy. Pour out a tot."

"Fell in?" asked Jimmy as he half-filled a tumbler.

"No. Pushed in."

David told him of the affair.

"Was it those stiffies we ran across the day before yesterday?" asked Jimmy when David finished his tale.

"I couldn't be sure. It looked like them."

"H'mph! A put-up job, Dave. Your friend Margesson."

"Yes," said David as he thoughtfully took a drink.

"What'll you do about it? He seems a hard man to satisfy."

"If this satisfies him I'll cry quits."

Jimmy looked surprised.

"What? You'll let him get away with it?"

"I cannot be everlastingly thrashing the man, Jimmy. I don't want to be bothered with him. I'm beginning to feel pleasantly inclined towards him, for if it hadn't been for him I'd never have met the girl."

Jimmy Drake's face clouded, and he looked rather anxiously at David.

"You've got it bad, Dave. Worse than I thought. Hope it doesn't lead to softenin' of the brain. I've seen fellers go that way. I know you aren't vindictive, but it's not like you to pass a thing like this. Sufferin' cats! it's common assault and battery!—and him a mayor."

"We've only surmise to go upon," said David, "although it seems pretty obvious. Those chaps weren't out for robbery, and Margesson's the only man in this town who's got a grudge against me. Still, there's no proof. And anyhow, I feel so good and peaceable I could sit down and drink soda water with a missionary. We'll forget about him."

Jimmy shook his head.

"I believe in an eye for an eye, Dave, and a tooth for a tooth, and two of each if you can get 'em. Besides, he's a mayor, and ought to know better. He should be taught the dignity of his position. What about me and two of the men givin' him a rough house? It'll be something to occupy our minds with. So far as I can see we'll be rustin' here for months, and if we don't have a little diversion now and then we'll go sour."

David laughed as he began to take off his wet clothes.

"Let him be, Jimmy. He's the civic head of this town, and we mustn't incapacitate him from his duties. I'm turning in. Have me roused at five o'clock. And Jimmy, you and I have seen the sun go down on too many joyous days ever to quarrel; but I'd take it kindly if you'd be a little less sarcastic in your allusions to—er—to the affair that detains us here. You lack reverence, old son. Good night."

Jimmy sat blankly staring at the stateroom door which had closed behind David.

"Well, by crikey! but that's a hot one," he muttered. "Poor Dave! He's already lost his

hankerin' for a scrap, and now it looks as though he'd mislaid his sense o' humour. Lack reverence! An' me a married man! . . . allusions! He's even takin' to usin' big words——” Jimmy lifted his glass and drained it, set it down, and as he rose to put out the lamp went on: “It's amazin' what havoc a woman can work in a week. Dave, you bragged of your freedom, but it's gone—like this!” and he puffed out the light. In his room, as he wound up his watch, he continued and finished his soliloquy. “Mebbes she's good enough for him, and worth the price he's tumbling over himself to pay—she's a dinky little bird, I will say that—and mebbes she isn't . . . seems to me, though, we ain't got many more purple days comin', Dave; but I'll have one on my own if I ever get within jumpin' distance of that blinkin' mayor.” He climbed heavily into his bunk, and murmured as he settled down: “Damn the women, anyway!”

CHAPTER IX

GREEK—BUT NOT CAVEMAN

AT six o'clock next morning David set off by tram for the further end of the town, and from the terminus walked blithely out along the country road which led towards the Hills of Love. Arrived there, he took the path between them and headed for the beach. When he had come to the steep cliffs he paused awhile and gazed seaward, but could make out no dark speck of a woman's head.

"That's good," he muttered with deep satisfaction :
"I'm in time."

He found a track down the cliffs, and landed at a point two hundred yards north of the cove. A few people were paddling about inshore, but of these he took no notice. He walked along the beach until he reached the spot where the cliffs turned inward to form the cove. The winter seas had here eaten their way into the base of the rocky escarpment, hollowing from the softer portions deep caverns in which a regiment of bathers could have stripped. Selecting one of these caves he went inside and donned his costume, and then flung his raincoat over his shoulders and came outside to sit in the sun and wait for Marion. It was a gloriously bright morning, with dappled clouds sailing high in the blue. He lit a cigarette, and with arms around his bent knees gave himself up to the thrill and anticipation of the adventure.

"If being in love always makes a chap feel good like this," he thought, "I'd have been powerful sorry to have missed it. It's better than cocktails."

From his position he could see nearly the whole length

of the ravine, and he watched intently for the first glimpse of Marion. Presently a loose-robed figure appeared on the porch of her bungalow, and the next moment she was running swiftly down the path to the beach. His heart thumped, and he felt a sudden excitement that left his mouth dry.

"Gad! isn't it queer?" he muttered; "hanged if I'm not all of a tremble! Steady, old boy; you'll want an even pulse presently."

Soon Marion was picking her way across the shingle. She paused at the high-water mark to kick off her beach shoes and set her cloak down; and then she made a dash for the water. There was no hesitancy in her approach: rather a romping eagerness which displayed itself in a series of skips and jumps, a vigorous wading through the shallows, a stooping to the creaming rollers, and then a graceful dive through one curling monster ere it broke. The next instant she was heading straight out to sea.

"My hat!" said David as he dropped his raincoat and plunged for the water: "if she continues at that rate I'll never catch her this side of Christmas."

He himself was an accomplished swimmer, but did not possess anything like Marion's gift of speed and stamina, and realised it. He therefore swam his hardest for two or three hundred yards, and then let out a stentorian hail. This brought Marion's head up, and David saw her glance over her shoulder. He waved a hand, and then he perceived that she had halted in her headlong rush and had begun to circle slowly; he put on a spurt and quickly came up to her. As he approached, swimming on the breast the better to see her, he chuckled at her look of utter surprise.

"Good morning," he gasped. "Jolly morning—for a—swim."

"Good morning," she answered in a subdued, wondering tone, treading water. "Whatever on earth are you doing here?"

"Wait until—I get my—breath," he answered. He drew close, and then, with no more than three feet separating them, he, too, began to tread water. "You were—out when I called—on you before, so I thought this way—of visiting would be as—good as any. Rather awkward, talking—like this. Won't you—ugh!——" and then he gurgled as a wavelet lapped against his face and filled his mouth with water—"won't you come out and sit on—the sands and talk. I like salt, but not in—liquid form."

She was more buoyant than he, with her head further out of the water, and so did not experience his difficulty in talking.

"I haven't begun to enjoy my swim yet," she objected.

He smiled winningly at her.

"But surely you can do—with a short one—for once. Or what about having another quarter-of-a-mile—say, and I'll go back and sit on the—beach and wait for you. You have me licked to a finish at this—game. Won't you? Please do. I've come a long way to see you."

She laughed, and her white teeth flashed in the sun.

"Well, you must have thought it worth while," she retorted.

"I did, sure enough. I could be content with just this, but it's not—getting us, me, any forrader. And we are—growing older every minute we live."

She gazed with wide eyes, quizzing him.

"You think we'll get forrader, then?"

"You bet I do. It would be hell—to think otherwise. Then you'll come? It'll be bonza sitting in the sunshine."

"I'm afraid I won't have a great deal of time," she replied, but on a sudden impulse went on: "I'll tell you what, though—you may come and have breakfast with me. That will give us an extra hour."

He grinned his delight.

"You certainly are a sport. Better be getting on—with that extra quarter-of-a-mile, and I'll be heading for the beach."

"I'll come ashore with you now. But don't jump to conclusions. I'm only the victim of curiosity."

"I'm jumping to nothing," was his calm answer. "I'm living from—minute to minute—ugh! dickens take these waves; I'll be so full of—salt I'll need no condiments for a week! I'm living from minute to minute, as—I always have done. A man gets what he deserves; and if you could—read my past and future you'd know I deserved—nothing less than you! Let's be swimming; I believe I'm higher out of—the water that way."

She at once struck out leisurely, and he kept pace by her side.

"You march very quickly," she said after a while.

"You mean my last speech? I've got—to march quickly for I'm a long way behind the—column. The thought that's tormenting me now is that I've met you too late. But we'll talk about this—presently—in comfort."

And so they swam on in silence, and Marion's thoughts were busy. There was a delicious *bizarrerie* about this encounter which was at one with all her experience of the Australian. His novel idea of visiting, his whirlwind tactics and directness of thought and speech were what she might have expected; but she was not in the least prepared for the almost boyish worship and adoration that shone from his eyes. She had expected to read something more sophisticated, more worldly, in his expression.

Very soon they were wading out upon the beach. David ran ahead, saying:

"My clothes are in that cavern yonder. I'll slip along and dress, and then come up to the bungalow." After a few steps he called over his shoulder: "And I say, I'm so hungry I could eat a wire mattress. If

you've any eggs—I generally take three ; and if you've any ham—I like it thick and juicy ! ”

“ Your orders shall be obeyed, my lord,” was Marion's demure response as she made for her bathing cloak. A moment later she was running swiftly up the ravine path.

Half-an-hour afterwards David sat on the verandah of the bungalow, with an outsize in breakfasts before him, and, at the other side of the wicker table, a fresh and glowing Marion dressed in a dainty work frock of simple quaker design which suited her to perfection. And right at that moment she was undergoing her second series of surprises at David's attitude and manner towards her. The novelty and unexpectedness of the situation, its cosy air of intimacy, the sweet witchery of the girl, had struck him into a sudden shyness. His naïveté was refreshing and wholly at odds with the maturity of his years ; and in his embarrassed courtesy to her, cultured yet hesitating, there was that which made her feel proud and glad, and which stilled for ever the clamouring voice which had bade her subject this man to a more critical estimate. “ Greek,” she thought, “ but surely not Caveman ! ” She smiled as she ministered to his wants, and had great joy of his happiness.

“ I'd an idea you had a lot to say to me,” she presently reminded him, “ and time is on the wing.”

“ I have a lot to say,” was his instant response, “ but I've got to take all this in first. I don't mean my breakfast—I'm making a glorious wreck of it—but the—the astounding thrill and joy of being here. Girl, I've never been in love before, and I think it's gone to my head ! ”

This was marching with a vengeance ! It struck her as being funny, too. It had such a confiding ring, such a simple directness that was almost impersonal. It took no cognisance of her or her feelings. It swept her into the role of confidante when by all the rules it

should have asked for partnership. It was like taking his state of mind to pieces and showing her the parts. It sorted ill with his painfully obvious shyness. He went on :

“ You remember how I paced the deck before you ? ” She nodded. “ I was fighting then. You already had the half-nelson on me—I mean,” he hastily corrected himself with a smile—“ you were tugging at something in me, and I saw my freedom coming down in ruins. I didn’t want to be in love. It meant putting the gyves on my wrists and ankles ; shackling my independence. And now here I am with my schooner laid up indefinitely, and sitting at your table eating breakfast, and just tickled to death at it all. Yes, it has a dizzying effect.” He suddenly looked at her in rather a startled manner. “ And the rummest thing is that I don’t know your surname yet ! ”

“ Fay,” she said at once, with a quickening of the excitement that had simmered in her ever since he had overtaken her in the water. She wanted him to go on.

“ Fay ? F-a-y ? ” he asked. She nodded. He continued : “ Marion Fay. Well, it’s a better name than Polly Platts.” He shot her a whimsical glance, and she remembered her saucy reference to his own name. “ I’ve opened out now,” he went on, “ so I may as well continue and tell you the things I want to tell you I’m a man’s man—I mean I’ve lived and fought most of my life with men. Of course,” he went on with tremendous candour, “ I’ve known women—lots of ’em ; and I’ve sisters, though I’ve not seen much of them during the last fifteen years. But if any girl wanted to grab hold of me by the hair and hold me up and say : ‘ See what I’ve caught—he belongs to me ! ’ I scattered and went to sea, or took up an exploring trip. I didn’t fancy being staked out as anybody’s claim ; so you’ll know now what I meant when I said I’d suffered a sea change.”

She laughed, and then asked challengingly :

"And are you content just to be in love?"

"You bet I'm not. But it's about as much as my head can stand just now. I'm not a hog. I reckon I'm like a puppy that's just got its eyes opened and flounders about yapping and squeaking. But there's one thing you *can* tell me—*have* I met you too late?"

"And what if you have?" she could not help taunting him. "You said it would be hell—what would you do?"

He was grimly silent for a while, and looked steadily seawards. At last he spoke:

"Oh, I guess I could take my gruel. If I'm too late, then inside twenty-four hours my schooner will have her nose pointed for the South Seas again. I could live it down. I'll always be Captain of my soul . . . you know those fine lines of Henley's?"

She nodded.

"You wouldn't fight for me, then?"

"If I knew there was a hundredth part of a chance I'd fight a regiment. But what would be the good of fighting if there was no chance? If you've given another fellow the right to take up any more of your time than I, or would give it him if he wanted it, then that ends the affair. Fate will have done me a scurvy trick, but I'd still snap my fingers at fate. I wouldn't waste my life, or go about like a moonstruck calf."

There was a gleam in her eyes at this.

"Then love wouldn't be the big thing in your life it ought to be if you could so calmly accept defeat."

"I wouldn't accept it calmly. Love would be—it already is—the biggest thing in my life: but it's not the only thing. I lived a lot before I met you. I'll live a lot more even if I get up from this table knowing I'm so far behind the column I'll never come up with it. But, by St. Crispin, if I'm *not* too late, then life is going to be so good I'll always be living on the crest of the wave!" He sat back and lit a cigarette. "So what about it?" he finished calmly, though

Marion noticed that his hand trembled ever so slightly. But his piercing blue eyes were looking steadily into hers, and she saw behind them the proud spirit of one who would never cringe to the hardest buffets of fate. A sudden thrilling tremulousness went through her being. She looked away, down into her lap, where she had unknowingly let her hands fall. She felt glad that she was able to say what she was going to say.

"You are not behind the column at all. You are in the ranks, stepping it with the best!"

He sat still for a moment, and Marion felt that she would never forget the look in his eyes as long as she lived. They snapped and sparkled with joy. Then he leaned forward eagerly, and was about to speak when she held up her hand.

"But don't mistake—I've given you nothing; no right to be anywhere but in the ranks."

"Well, that's good enough for me. I've no kick coming. But I've talked enough. Haven't you anything to say?"

She laughed.

"Yes. I'd like a cigarette, please."

He took out his case and held it to her.

"You smoke, then?"

"Occasionally—about five a day."

"I suppose it's the modern way, though I don't like to see a woman doing it."

"Why?" she challenged.

"Dunno. Just an old-fashioned prejudice, I suppose. But don't mind that. I must say your mouth looks rather pretty pursed about the thing; and the way you hold it seems to add grace to your hand."

She stared, and then laughed.

"You flatter like an old courtier!"

"I don't. I'm speaking truth, as it appears to me. I'm a noticing sort of chap, and of course I'm studying you."

"Thanks," she replied rather tartly. "I hope to be a good subject."

"Oh, not critically," he hastened to explain: "just so as I may know you, and have you intimately in my thoughts."

She went all rosy at this, and laughed shyly; and she thought, as she got up to cover her blushes and began to clear away the things: "He's just lovely."

He insisted on helping her with the washing up, and when she protested he said:

"I'm not the one to hang around camp when there's work to be done."

She let him have his way, and was vastly amused at the serious attention and thoroughness he brought to the task. Once he passed a plate back to her with the remark: "That's not clean; there's a bit of egg still sticking on it."

"You are very particular—for a man," she answered sharply, flopping the plate back into the bowl.

"If we are cleaning plates let's have 'em clean," was his quiet answer. "Do you camp out here all summer?"

"Yes, and some of the winter as well."

"It's a dinky little place, and you've ideas about furnishing. I shall enjoy coming here."

"Wouldn't it be as well to wait until you are asked?"

"Why, you're surely going to invite me along?" he said, pausing with a plate in one hand and towel in the other.

"I was, but you needn't take so much for granted!"

He looked slightly distressed, and then grinned boyishly.

"You caught me dead on the wicket there. I've certainly lost my head, and my manners with it. I suppose the wish was father to the thought, and I can tell you the parent's a pretty lusty chap. You'll not chalk it up against me, will you?"

Marion was fain to laugh.

"Oh, I'd never dream of doing that. It wouldn't be playing the game, for you've shown me you didn't intend to be impertinent."

"I certainly don't want to be that," he said with deep seriousness. "There'd be no sense at all in it, would there?"

He went on polishing and polishing a plate, and looking at her, and thinking what beautiful arms she had, and how supple and straight she was, and marvelling at her dark hair and fair skin, and realising what a wonder and glory lay in the curve of her throat as it passed to her gently swelling breast. "She's as clean as mountain snow," he told himself, "and I'm glad I never had the thought or the time to paddle in the mire myself . . . but I've got to be careful not to barge around like a rudderless ship and say things without thinking."

When Marion was ready to set off for work he asked permission to accompany her so far on the road.

"I always call in at home first," she said, "just to let dad know I'm all right. He doesn't agree with my camping out like this. You may go that far with me."

He thanked her, and then said:

"You have a mother living as well?"

"Oh, yes."

"And does she agree?"

"She thinks it wise to let me have my way. She keeps pace with the modern trend of things."

He laughed.

"Then I reckon poor dad is in a minority of one. I'll bet he got that dog for you."

"He did," laughed Marion, "so you can judge how scared he was! . . . by the way, before I forget, I met your friend the mayor the other day."

"That's interesting," said David, giving her a

quick look. "I had a little reminder myself last night that he was still at large. How was he looking?"

"Except for a swollen fist he seemed to be all right again. He referred to the fight, apologised for the brutality of it, and made certain accusations against you."

"Wasn't he convinced he was fairly beaten, then?"

"Oh, he admitted that. But he swore that when he struck the blow which called down your vengeance it was an accident. He said his foot slipped, and that you took advantage of it to beat him to the ground."

"And what did you say?"

"I championed you, of course, and twitted him with cowardice for not fighting back until he dropped. He said he did, but that you were too strong for him. He maintained he was no coward, and that you would bear him out in that. When I said I would ask you he was quite taken aback."

David was silent awhile.

"What do you want me to say," he presently asked. "I thought I'd made the matter clear at the time."

"I wouldn't have championed you if you hadn't," was her quiet response.

"Then do you want me to admit that the fight was brutal and low? Because I won't do it."

"Nor that either. There are some things between man and man which I imagine can only be settled by combat."

"Well, then, there's only the question of his cowardice. He's certainly no coward. He has spunk and spirit, and fought back as well as he was able."

"But he deliberately struck a foul and cowardly blow!"

"Still, the odds were heavily against him. He was giving a lot away in height and reach. The blow was foul enough. As a matter of fact he had been fighting foul all through, but that one was the limit. It made me mighty angry at the time—but I wouldn't

say it was cowardly. It was the desperate resort of a man who will sell his soul in the open market any day in order to be top dog, who really knows no fear when it's a question of victory. History's full of men like that. No, Margesson's not a coward, whatever else he may be."

"You are royally generous to him, and it's what I wanted you to say; you make me very happy . . . but what was the reminder you had last night that he was still at large?"

"A couple of toughs set about me and pitched me into the dock. They admitted they were working to instructions. I've no actual proof, but it could have been nobody else but Margesson who set them on. There you have the man. He'll never rest so long as the score is against him, or he fancies it is so. He's a curious chap."

Marion was staring aghast at him.

"Did he intend to drown you?"

"No. I was only to have what the toughs called a slugging."

"And what happened? Did they beat you?"

"They hit me once, and I fell off the wharf. I climbed out and knocked their heads together, and then booted them into the dock."

"And what are you going to do about it?"

"That's what Jimmy Drake—my mate—wanted to know. What else is there to do? I cannot be forever thrashing him."

Marion walked on, a troubled look now in her face.

"That man spells danger," she said at last. "He radiates evil. I rather think he's got designs on me; and since I championed you his hatred of you is likely to have increased tenfold. You must be careful."

"My dear girl, I'm able to take care of myself. And there's law and order in England, surely, and a very efficient police force. Besides, he's a man of civic responsibility. He'd never endanger his position

by resorting to real violence ; and that's all we need have any fear of. But if he makes himself obnoxious to you, you'll be sure to let me know ? ”

Marion smiled demurely.

“ I might, and I might not. You'd want to go and fight him again. And it would be giving you a right, wouldn't it, to protect me ? ”

“ Well, and don't you want to give it ? ” he challenged. He had, for the moment, forgotten his shyness.

“ It would be difficult to say,” she evaded. “ If I wanted protection I'd naturally turn to dad.”

“ Ah, yes, of course.” And embarrassment flooded his soul.

CHAPTER X
GOLDEN DAYS

MARGESSON'S "big business" was no figment of the imagination. He and Mr. Fay were in truth engaged at this time in discussing the preliminaries to the settling of a contract for three cargo steamers, which were to form the nucleus of an over-seas fleet that the mayor had decided to build. After his meeting with Marion in the restaurant Margesson forthwith placed the order for the vessels, rather to the shipbuilder's surprise, but very much to his satisfaction and delight.

"We had scarcely begun to get down to brass tacks," he said to his chief draughtsman, "and now here's the order. Must be a catch in it somewhere, or Margesson's not the hard driver he has the reputation of being. Anyhow, it's very satisfactory, and gives us a clear fifteen hundred extra profit on each ship."

But of course there was no "catch" that the shipbuilder was to be allowed to see. He himself was the catch. Margesson was very well aware that he had closed the business prematurely, and in so doing had sacrificed at least three thousand pounds. But he would have considered twice that amount the merest sprat if it brought the bigger fish he was after into his net.

Mr. Fay unwittingly furthered this design by inviting Margesson to dinner to celebrate the happy conclusion of the negotiations. Margesson displayed a gratified and affable smile.

"Charmed, I'm sure," he said. "I had the pleasure of meeting your daughter the other day—our friend

Mr. Cossar introduced me to her—and I must congratulate you, Mr. Fay. She's charming, charming! I'll look forward to making her further acquaintance."

There was no mistaking the suggestion that underlay this reference to Marion, nor the hint it contained of Margesson's attitude to her. The shipbuilder was secretly rather pleased, for he could not gainsay the fact that Margesson was becoming a power in the town. He had heard it rumoured that wealth was literally pouring in on him. It was the great post-war boom period of ships and shipping, and many a war profiteer was rounding off his fortune with the extra nought which entitled him to be called a millionaire. There was talk that Margesson had already reached that status. He certainly lived in great style in a fine old house on the outskirts of the town; and as he had contrived in his ascent of the social ladder to adopt the suave, easy manners and polished exterior of a man of the world, he was, to the rather worldly eye of Mr. Fay, an altogether eligible suitor for Marion's hand.

He was not slow to push the advantage gained by that first invitation. He gave a sumptuous party in return, at which he made Marion feel rather uncomfortable by the assiduous attentions he paid her, and by his unspoken suggestion that the affair was in her honour and at which she was chief guest. In a few weeks he had managed to become on almost intimate visiting terms at the shipbuilder's, so boldly and skilfully had he followed up his introduction to the family. Mr. Fay complacently encouraged him, and Margesson made the most of the opportunities that the shipbuilder threw in his way. And very quickly the time came when he admitted to himself that from wanting Marion merely because she was physically and socially desirable, he had progressed to the stage of wanting her for herself alone: he had grown to love her with a fierce and unholy passion.

To Marion it was all very distasteful. She rebelled

at having Margesson invited to her tennis parties, at having to meet him at dinner, at being compelled to join her father and mother in their acceptances of Margesson's continual invitations to this and that function. But since Margesson was her father's friend, and since business matters were so intimately mixed with social affairs, she could do no other than treat the mayor courteously, and respect—being a girl with a deep sense of duty—her father's wishes as far as possible.

"It's all so futile," she complained to her mother, "but daddy just won't see it. He's throwing me at Margesson's head, and I simply hate the sight of the man."

"Never mind, dear," said her mother, "some day he'll propose, and then you'll be able to put an end to it. Frankly, Marion, I'd rather see you dead than married to that man."

"Then why don't you tell dad?"

"I have, but he just pooh-poohs; says I am prejudiced, and wants Margesson to have his chance. He thinks the mayor would be a good match for you. I told him you had no use for Margesson, but he still insisted that until you've definitely refused him he is to be encouraged and treated with all possible consideration. So there it is. Your father can be obstinate when he likes."

Marion laughed.

"Poor old daddy: I'll bet he's wishing these were the days of his grandmother, when girls were supposed to respect and fear their fathers so much that they would marry to order—only I expect they didn't, really, but got their own way by roundabout methods. Mr. Margesson must be an extraordinary kind of optimist, for if I treat him half as hatefully as I feel towards him I cannot see how he can hope to get me. Well, I'm beginning to be fed up, mumsie. So in self defence I'm going to bring my new young man

along. I've never told you about him, but I've been having a perfectly adventurous time lately. Bend your ear, and I'll my tale unfold. And when you know all, you've got to be a jolly conspirator, and throw opportunities in his way as dad throws them in Margesson's. You'll want to, for oh, he's simply too lovely and scrumptious for anything. He's an Australian, he's six-feet-two, he fought at Anzac, he has a schooner of his own, he's explored, and gold-mined, and cowboy'd, and sailed the South Seas and had adventures and lived, as he puts it, a lot. His father is a wealthy sheep-farmer, and he has sisters and has never been in love before; and he wanted to run away from falling in love with me because he'd decided never to sell his independence and freedom to any girl. And, hold your breath, mumsie dear, it all came about because I interfered in a fight he was having with—whom do you think?—Margesson! Isn't it romantic? Listen!" When she had finished her tale of how she had come to know David she went on: "and I'm inviting him to my tennis party on Saturday. Daddy's already asked Mr. Margesson, so the protagonists will be on the stage together! Won't it be exciting?"

"Very," commented Mrs. Fay drily. "Er—my dear, there seems to be a good deal about this young man's love for you in your story—has he asked you to marry him?"

Marion trilled joyously.

"Oh lor', mumsie, no! He's just busy loving me, that's all, and it's lovely. Almost the first thing he said on that morning when he came so strangely a-visiting was that he loved me. He did it in the most impersonal and delicious way in the world! All he wanted to know then was whether there was any chance—whether he was behind the column, as he quaintly put it. He says queer things. He's thirty-one, and to think he's never had a love affair! It's almost

unbelievable these days. He says he's been too busy enjoying himself! And that's funny, too, isn't it?
" . . . you'll fall in love with him, mumsie."

"Perhaps I shall," said Mrs. Fay. "The point is—have you?"

"That, as Mr. Kipling says, is another story," laughed Marion teasingly; "after you've seen him, I'll tell you."

"H'mph! My dear, it's either a dangerous game, for him, that you're playing—or a very lovely one for you both."

Marion was serious for a while.

"Ah—h!" she sighed happily: "it's so lovely I think it must be a dream! It doesn't belong to this prosaic, post-war world."

* * * * *

They were, in truth, golden days that Marion was living, and Margesson and his bland, persistent wooing were the only clouds that dimmed their brightness. David, living joyously on the crest of the wave, and revelling in happiness he would not have believed it possible for mortals to attain, had simply overwhelmed her in the whirlwind of his smiling good-humour, his gay spirit, the direct, unequivocal drive of his mind. He had boldly sought her out in the days succeeding that morning of his first visit, and plunged into a courtship which had in it something of the epic qualities of the man and his life, and which was more glorious and thrilling, more strange and beautiful, than anything Marion had ever dreamed of. They went swimming together, walking, driving; he took her sailing in his schooner. He talked much to her, when he had lost his shyness; laid bare his inmost soul for her wondering, awed inspection; spoke potently of the deep thoughts that come to a man in the solitudes, and revealed a mind that lived much within itself,

and had its own limpid-clear views on life, and its own clean, sane calendar of conduct. He told her of his adventures, of the countries he had visited; painted whimsical pictures of the men he had known, and lived with, and fought among. And lastly, he talked of his love for her. That was the strange and beautiful thing. As on that first day, he made of it something about which he seemed impelled to take her into his confidence. He analysed himself; spoke in pregnant sentences, hammered out from his own conceptions, of the beauty of sweetheartship; of being so certain that happiness lay within another's giving, and how wonderful that was; of the mysterious force of love, strong enough to change the whole outlook and aspirations of one such as he. He poked fun at himself for his previous high and mighty contempt for men who sold themselves for love.

"I'm beginning to understand a whole heap of things," he told her. "I see now it's something to glory in, something to be utterly thankful for, something that's the very arch and keystone of life. It gives to life its true meaning. Freedom and independence are fine things: I'd set them on a pedestal. But this that's happened to me is something finer still. It teaches a fellow tolerance, makes him humble, brings home to him a little more of what his mother has been to him, and explains his father. And then there's the joy of it all. It's better than out-riding a vicious horse, better than out-sailing a tornado, better than out-fighting a chap as big and as clever as yourself, better than danger and adventure and success: it's—oh, thunder, girl, it's as I said, better than cock-tails!"

He never once asked her if she herself was stirred, never seemed to doubt the ultimate issue. There was a day when she twitted him about all this abstract glorification, and startled him by asking:

"Don't you ever want to kiss me?"

He bent upon her a look that burnt to her brain. For a long moment he stared fixedly at her, and there was a furrow of anxiety on his smooth brow. Then he chuckled :

"You don't know how beautiful your mouth is, or you'd not ask a silly question like that."

He took her in his arms, bent down and held his face close to hers. The sweet scent of her hair filled his nostrils, her soft pliant body was warm against his. She did not resist, neither did she yield ; nor did he kiss her, though all his senses were thrilling. After holding her so, while he looked deep into her eyes, he suddenly released her.

"Why—why didn't you ? " she gasped.

"Did you so badly want me to ? "

"I?—your kisses are nothing to me," she lied valiantly.

"And that's why," was his smiling answer. "You'd have let me, just to satisfy yourself I'm flesh and blood. Marion, you've a lump of Eve in you, and I love that as I love the rest of you. I'm flesh and blood all right—you'll know it as soon as ever I get downright busy. But I'm not having any of your kisses so long as it doesn't matter a tinker's curse to you whether you have any of mine or not."

"You should take what the gods offer you, without conditions," she flashed.

"I never was the one to do that. The gods are not always wise. You've just proved it."

She flushed.

"You are old-fashioned. The modern girl likes to be kissed."

"The modern girl isn't much different from her forbears in that respect, I imagine. I guess I'm not old-fashioned ; and I know what's good as well as anyone. You're modern enough, Marion, and I daresay your likes are up-to-date. And yet I make bold to say that you've never been very free with your kisses.

You are not built that way. You see I'm very sure of you."

"And of yourself!" she replied rather sharply. "You seem quite satisfied in your own mind that some day I *shall* want your kisses."

He laughed joyously.

"My goodness gracious, girl, I should say so! Has it not been written? It is destiny. You and I were born to meet, and the flame of our souls to coalesce. Where else on earth shall we find our match? It's no use shying, Marion. It'll come to you. You cannot defy your fate."

"You are extravagant," she said a little breathlessly. He had always had the power to stir her; and in spite of herself she knew she was being caught up in the soaring flight of his love. A flame of worship was mounting higher and higher within her breast at each never-to-be-forgotten visit he paid her. In the secret places of her heart she already knew that what she had called his extravagance was but the simple truth. Had he got "downright busy" there and then he could have carried the frail defences she had built about herself: the pride which forbade too easy a conquest; the determination not to yield until the supreme, the glorious hour had come; the desire to prolong the thrilling time of his wooing. But he, too, was busy in extracting the last essential drop of delight from his courtship, and so he also was content to wait for the supreme, inevitable moment. That moment was not yet.

* * * * *

When she had asked him to her tennis party he had smiled his delight.

"I'll be glad to meet your people, and your friends; gladder perhaps than your people will be to meet me. However, that's got to come along with lots of other

things. I don't know about tennis, though. I've played very little since I left school."

"You have played, though. It'll soon come back to you."

"Oh, I guess I'll not wreck your party, or smash any windows . . . I'm wondering how I can get a bit of practice between now and Saturday—there's nothing else for it." He grinned and chuckled. "Jimmy Drake's got to come and pitch them down to me. I'll take a lease on one of the public courts for the mornings. I can practice serving, and Jimmy can spoon-feed me so I'll be able to get used to the feel of the racquet and the ball. But I'm smiling already at what he'll say!"

CHAPTER XI
THE TENNIS PARTY

THE next day at breakfast David greeted Jimmy Drake :
" Morning, James. How goes it ? You look glum. Stomach sour ? "

Jimmy grunted.

" I'm all right, Dave. I'm learning how to be reverent, that's all, and it's very lowerin' to the system. I bought a dictionary yesterday."

" A dictionary ? "

" Ay, I wanted to see what ' allusions ' meant."

David laughed.

" Josh away, my bucko. I can stand it, for things are going sweeter than a marriage bell. My lady's invited me to play tennis on Saturday, and meet her folks."

Jimmy groaned.

" A sissy game, tennis."

" Don't you believe it, old son. Anyhow, you'll have a chance to see what sort of a game it is, for I want you to come out with me this morning and help me to get ship-shape for Saturday. I want you sling 'em down so's I can hit 'em."

" What ? Me ? Not on your life, Dave."

" Be a sport, Jimmy."

" Where do you reckon to play ? "

" There are plenty courts in the Public Park. We'll go and raid a sports' outfitters presently, and get fixed up with the necessary gear : must have flannels—ducks will hardly do. We'll want racquets and balls."

"And a heap o' nerve to make an exhibition of ourselves before the public! Well, get on with it, Dave. Better make a fool of me in the Park than a fool of yourself on Saturday. You can lead me to the sacrifice. I'll not have it said that I went back on a pal."

Later, Jimmy decided that his pre-conceptions about the game were wrong. At first he contented himself with gently spooning the balls over for David to drive; then, as he became accustomed to the feel of the racquet in his hand, he fell a victim to curiosity, and tried hitting as David was doing—with disastrous results in the beginning. The first ball he swiped is probably travelling yet across the wastes of interstellar space! He stood with a grin on his face and watched the ball sailing into the blue.

"Gee! Dave, that was a hummer! Reckon if I hadn't put so much loft to it you'd have bust your gee-string gettin' down to it. It ain't so blame easy, though."

"It ain't," laughed David. "Try again."

Curiosity presently gave place to a desire to *play* at the game. The age-old spirit of rivalry inevitably rose in Jimmy's breast. He began chasing David's shots, scooping some back, never getting within yards of others, but valiantly making an effort at every one. Nothing was impossible. He seemed to have conceived the idea that he wasn't playing the game unless he took up arms and racquet against every ball that got over the net. Soon under the almost tropical sun he was plentifully larding the earth with sweat, cursing cheerfully under his breath, and actually enjoying himself. At last he had to stop for sheer want of wind.

"It ain't no sissy game after all," he cried as he mopped his streaming face. "And thunder! doesn't it give you a thirst? I'll have some trouble in restoring the percentage, Dave. One pint won't come anywhere

near it. Well, old son, I reckon I *played* you, eh? I wasn't lettin' any flannel-coated pill have the laugh on me!"

David encouraged him in his naïve illusion, with the result that he strove harder than ever, perspired until the moisture ran into his eyes, achieved a good deal in giving David a much better practice than he could have hoped for, and incidentally afforded a few spectators an entertainment which moved them to good-humoured hilarity.

"I'll have to take up this game, Dave," he said when they had finished. "I used to be pretty good at cricket as a youngster, and I don't see why I shouldn't make hay of a soft ball after a bit of practice. Coming out to-morrow?"

"Sure," said David grinning, "that's the idea. You can't have too much practice."

"That goes with all games. I say, though: you've a few strokes I haven't got the hang of yet, Dave. Reckon you can put me up to some wrinkles."

"Not too many, you old son of a sea cook, or you'll be beating me at my own game," replied David with sly diplomacy.

"Ay," said Jimmy with delightful complacence. "I played you, eh? Pretty good for a first shot! You'll be all right for Saturday. By then I shouldn't wonder but what I'm putting winners past you most of the time. I used to be hot at games when I was a kid."

David chuckled with glee to hear him, and put an arm about his shoulders and shook him playfully.

"You old bucko, you! I'll tell Marion. Mebbes she'll ask you to her next party."

At this Jimmy looked doubtful.

"No, I don't think I could be bothered with women clutterin' about like a lot o' hens. They'd put me off my game. Besides I'm apt to swear a bit on the

quiet when I get my blood up, so don't you say anything about me, Dave."

"I will," chuckled David. "You've let yourself in for it. Oh, James, what a pair at the net you and Marion would make!"

"I'd be all right alongside her, Dave—I agree there. But don't you say anything about me. Anyway, they wouldn't have enough beer on the premises to satisfy my thirst after the game, so that settles it."

* * * * *

The Fays lived in an old, roomy, brick-built house set in its own small grounds. A short, gravelled carriage drive led up to it, and its wide front door was reached by a flight of shallow, semi-circular stone steps. It had originally belonged to a quaker family, who had laid quaint, flagged pathways about the garden, and filled the borders with old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers, and set up sun-dials and rose-bowers in odd corners, and made its spacious lawn with architectural precision. There still lingered about the house and garden the old-time air of cloistral, somnolent peace, even though the quiet was often broken by the laughter and boisterous good spirits of modern youth playing its strenuous games.

In the bright sunshine of that Saturday afternoon it looked to David's eyes as fair and fitting a place for his lady as poet or artist could have dreamed. A smiling maid had answered his summons, and before he could speak had said: "You are Mr. Grant? Miss Marion is in the garden. Will you come this way, please?" He followed her across the hall, through wide French windows to a paved terrace, and from thence amidst the sweet-smelling flowers down a winding path to the lawn. At the far side was the tennis court, at one end of which white-clad figures were sitting or standing about. As he drew near, a show of interest manifested itself among these people;

and then Marion detached herself from a group of three and came across to meet him. David was bare-headed, and his well-cut flannels and shirt, over which he wore a light-grey lounge jacket, showed his lean, muscular figure to perfection. A thrill of admiration and pride ran through Marion as she beheld him. Never had she seen him to such advantage; never had he looked so royal in his manhood. After their greetings she held him in conversation a little while, and he was nothing loath.

"What do you think of our garden?" she asked.

"If I were a poet I might tell you. It's lovely as you are lovely. I think you must have lived and played here as a child."

"I did," she said, her face lighting up. "I was born here. But how could you have known?"

"It has given you something of its spirit: the spirit that dwells in flowers—in roses and lavender. I can understand you better since I've seen it, and breathed it."

"What queer, beautiful things you do say," she said, looking at him for a moment with wide, dark eyes in which there glowed a light he had never yet seen there. Then quickly she veiled them, but could not conceal the flush of pleasure that swept to her forehead and downwards to her throat. She changed the subject with a little laugh.

"Did you get your practices?"

He smiled broadly.

"I did. Jimmy thinks he's giving me lessons now. I joshed him and said I'd get you to ask him to one of your parties."

"How I'd love to," she said eagerly, laughing. "Do you think he'd come?"

"I doubt it. You see he gets very hot, and he had an idea you wouldn't have enough beer on the premises to bring down his temperature."

"We could have a barrel sent up," laughed Marion.

Then she suddenly grew serious. "By the way, Mr. Margesson's here. Dad invites him. They have grown very friendly since they came together in business."

"Well," said David cheerfully, "if he doesn't bear any malice I don't . . . there's a lady coming towards us," he ended, looking interestedly past Marion in the direction of the tennis court. Marion turned about.

"Oh, it's mother—coming over to be introduced."

They began to walk towards her.

"Mumsie, this is David—Mr. Grant," said Marion.

Mrs. Fay smiled.

"I knew that, my dear." She held out her hand. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Grant——" she looked steadily up into his face, and her clear, untroubled eyes rested on his for the space of moments, and then she added quietly, but with entire conviction: "very pleased."

David gently took her hand in his strong fingers.

"I see you mean that, Mrs. Fay: and I'm honoured, and very, very glad"—he smiled rather shyly, in a way that won Mrs. Fay's heart, and continued: "because I'm afraid I must—er—must hoist the Jolly Roger at once. I'm bent on stealing your daughter, Mrs. Fay." He glanced quickly at Marion, and then back at her mother: "Marion will have told you?"

Mrs. Fay laughed gently.

"Oh, that's well understood, Mr. Grant. If you put it that way, you'll find yourself in a positive thieves' den here!"

David smiled again, and his eyes began to dance mischievously as his shyness left him:

"Is that so? Well, I'm expecting to be the boss thief, Mrs. Fay. Of course, I know Marion has no notion of allowing herself to be stolen just yet——"

"Quite true!" interjected Marion with a malicious little laugh.

"——but, also of course, she expects the worst!"

Mrs. Fay laughed appreciatively.

"Mr. Grant has the honours, Marion. And now it's time you introduced him to the rest." She turned to David: "Keep the Jolly Roger flying, Mr. Grant."

And with an encouraging smile she passed on towards the house.

"Your mother is awfully nice," said David to Marion as they crossed over to the tennis court.

"Oh, you've made a conquest," laughed Marion.

"And she has a nice sense of humour, too; and a right clear eye. I think we'll be great friends."

* * * * *

The party consisted of six other persons besides David and Marion; three men and three girls. At the moment they were separated into two groups. In the further group were Margesson and Johnny Cossar, and a sprightly, laughing girl, a school chum of Marion's. David went through the first introductions with the easy grace of a man sure of himself; and then Marion, with a feeling of excitement in her breast, led him over to the others.

Margesson had noted the advent of David with something like panic. He had never for a moment dreamed of meeting Grant there, still less of seeing him on such cordial terms with Marion. Panic was still driving his thoughts about when the pair came up. David frankly smiled and held out his hand.

"Hello! Margesson!"

Margesson stiffly rose to his feet, and with great deliberation put his hands behind him, sneered, and said loudly: "What do you expect me to do with that, Grant?" He looked first at David's outstretched hand and then at him.

A dull flush mounted in the cheeks of the Australian, but he answered quietly, as his hand dropped down:

"I expected you to shake it, of course, and not make an ass of yourself."

At this there was a yelp of delight from Johnny Cossar, who had watched the two men with keen interest. David coolly turned to Marion, who, quick to take his cue, proceeded to introduce him to Johnny and the girl. Margesson was ignored. He realised he had made a false move, and a foolish one; and had, moreover, been guilty of a gross breach of good manners. David had rendered his melodramatic pose utterly ridiculous. He was furious. As unobtrusively as he could he detached himself from the group and strolled over to the others, outwardly unconcerned, but with black rage seething in his heart.

As luck would have it, it so happened that presently in a spin of the racquets for partners and first set, Margesson and David were opponents. David and Marion's school chum were to play together. By this time Margesson had somewhat recovered his balance, and was resolutely setting himself the task of trying to cover up his folly and rehabilitate himself in the eyes of Marion. In her hearing he apologised to David and hoped the incident would not affect the game.

"As far as I'm concerned it won't," said David unsmilingly. He read behind the smooth words of his enemy, and took the apology for what it was worth. For himself he was totally unconcerned, but was rather distressed because of Marion; and when Margesson and his partner moved on to the court David turned to her and said in low tones:

"I'm sorry about it, my dear; but who'd have thought the blighter would forget himself like that?"

"Don't you worry a bit," replied Marion, laughing. "I'm not. He is the offender, and it's rather what I expected to happen. You put the lid on him nicely. Go on and enjoy your game, David. You've got a good partner."

"I hope I don't let her down, that's all," he said as he walked off to join her.

He did not let her down, though they were beaten in a close set. What he lacked in the finer points of the game he almost made up by his wonderful energy and activity. The victory put Margesson in a better humour, and he came off the court with his dark, slow smile playing on his lips; but he was now too astute to show the triumph he felt.

"A jolly good set," he said to Marion. "We had all the luck."

Marion looked at him with a little enigmatic smile.

"Very sporty of you to say so, Mr. Margesson."

He took heart of grace at this, and ventured to refer to the recent incident.

"Not at all," he said in answer to her remark; "we really did have all the luck. I think it was Mr. Grant who showed the better sportsmanship in consenting to play against me after my rudeness to him; and as to that, I must really apologise to you for forgetting myself. As your guest, it was unpardonable. But I'm only human. We were sworn enemies, you know, and I hadn't time to see that he really meant to bury the hatchet when he held out his hand. My first feelings got the better of me."

For a moment Marion looked him straight in the eyes. Doubt and unbelief were written in her expression.

"I do assure you I mean what I say," he insisted.

She shook her head slightly, and once more the enigmatic smile played about her lips.

"No, no, Mr. Margesson. You said you were only human. I'd have believed you at once and thought the better of you if you had frankly avowed the hatred you feel for Mr. Grant. But this!"—she shrugged her shoulders: "you dissemble too much!" She prepared to join the others for the next set. "How-

ever, it's a matter of indifference to me how you act towards Mr. Grant. I only ask you to remember that you are my *father's* guest : and that Mr. Grant is mine ! ”

And with that she left him, to gnaw his lips and ponder dubiously the inner meaning of her last words. He had a heavy sense of having bungled once again, and more badly than ever ; of having lost grip of the situation : it was making a shuttle-cock of him. However, he must sustain the rôle he had assumed, and live up to that speech of his to Marion. Confound it ! how cleverly she had seen through him. He had, indeed, dissembled too much, and now must go on with it, hating it and hating the cause of it. But he would be cleverer than she. She must be hoodwinked into believing that after all she was wrong. He would prove by further dissembling that he had not dissembled at all !

With all the energy of his mind he plunged into this course, and during the remainder of the time exerted himself in the effort to assume his customary suave urbanity of manner, and while not singling out David for special attention so to adjust his address towards him that it must inevitably seem that he had, indeed, accepted the truce. But all the time jealousy and rage were making tumult within him, and as the hours sped on he was not convinced that his efforts at conciliation were achieving their object, or that they affected one iota the persons to influence whom they were made. Marion's manner was no different from what it had ever been, whilst it was plain to be seen that David was the focus of her thoughts, the lodestone to which her eyes were ever swinging. There was absolutely no mistaking it. The Australian was in the ascendant, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood to him. He realised with soul-shattering force how much he himself wanted Marion, and also that if something did not happen soon to draw her thoughts from

David he was likely to continue wanting to the end of the chapter.

In the meantime David was enjoying himself hugely, in spite of the fact that, on being introduced to Mr. Fay, who joined the party at tea, he had sensed in him a faintly antagonistic attitude. The ship-builder was courteous, but critical, lacking altogether in the cordiality that Mrs. Fay had shown. Marion's father contrived to make David feel like an interloper, one to be tolerated for her sake, but decidedly not to be welcomed with open arms. David had accepted the elder man's appraisal with dignity, and had met reserve with reserve. But he had thought: "I guess he's touchy about Marion. If she were my daughter I'd be just as liable as he to give the frozen mitt to any new fellow that came hanging around. He needs time to get used to the idea"—which was certainly a generous thought on David's part, but altogether wide of the mark.

It was a thought, however, which absolved him from any feeling of unhappiness, and enabled him to go on enjoying himself. He entered into the games with whole-hearted enthusiasm, and seemed to affect everyone with his joyous good-spirits and abounding vitality. He and Johnny Cossar were the life and soul of the party: gaiety and humour revolved around them. Although the knell of all his hopes was sounding in the gentle Johnny's heart, he was fain to see in David a kindred spirit, a man entirely to his liking; and he was big-souled enough to cherish no petty resentment. He had the priceless gift of being able to poke fun at himself as well as at other people: he had the true, essential sense of humour, as distinct from the sense of the merely comic. And so he flouted his bitter fate with an inward laugh, reduced himself to the correct proportion in this tragi-comedy of love, and admitted that at best his could now be but a "walking-on" part. As soon as he had seen David and

Marion together his last illusion had vanished. Later he said to Marion, when they happened to be standing together watching a set in which David was taking part :

"I've christened him Superbus, Marion ; and I've got to say that he has torn it, totally torn it ! I've lost. I can only be a brother to you now, and Uncle Johnny to your children."

"Don't be silly, Johnno," said Marion rather weakly.

"Silly ? My dear girl, what can one do against a fellow who has stepped straight from between the covers of a Jack London novel ? He has no business to be here at all. He should be chasing the rainbow in the Fiji Islands, or dollars in California. Ah, well, Marion, his kind die young, and with their boots on—I'll wait. You'll make a very charming widow."

"You've got it all mighty pat, Johnny," retorted Marion spiritedly ; "we are only friends yet."

"There's much in that 'yet,' and more in the way you look at him, my dear. I've no illusions now ; and I don't think you have."

Marion was silent, embarrassed, troubled. She could not honestly deny Johnny's statement, yet was loath to say anything to hurt him.

"Your silence proves the truth of what I say," he went on steadily after a pause. "Well, good luck to your Australian. We cannot all have you."

"No," said Marion, rather relieved at Johnny's sporting way of taking it ; "and after all, there are finer fish in the sea than ever came out of it."

Johnny laughed.

"Indeed there are, but who wants them ? Still, a man can but trawl his net again, and pray the gods be kind !"

* * * * *

The last word of the day remained with Margesson.

"Good-bye, Grant," he said on taking his leave ;

and added in a low, menacing tone that only David could hear : " and damn you ! It's war to the knife now ! "

" Oh, quite," said David cheerfully.

But Margesson meant every word. That night he sat in his study thinking over the events of the day, and more than once he struck the arm of his chair and cried aloud :

" Curse the long-legged fiend ! He always wins."

Presently he got up and began to move restlessly about the room, lost in the grip of his emotions. A dozen schemes to get the better of David flitted through his mind. The Australian must be removed, eliminated from Marion's life definitely and forever—that was the burden of his thoughts. There must be no ambiguity about it. The manner of his going must leave her antagonistic and bitter, wound her, insult her pride, arouse her scorn—only thus would she forget him. A sinister, scowling, wolfish look was on Margesson's face as he strode about thinking these things : and then suddenly he sat down again in his chair, drawn and shaken ; for he had had a vision of the splendid edifice of his success lying in ruins, and himself a felon in the dock. Murder, plain murder, had been the main theme of those wild-cat schemes. For a long time he sat, his chin sunk on his breast, brooding over this luckless turn his life had taken, and seeing in every phase of his thoughts the alluring form and face of Marion. And gradually there grew in him the conviction that if he could not have her, then, indeed, his success might just as well lie in ruins at his feet. The achievement of all these years of endeavour would be no more than dead ashes without her. He realised that to a man of his age there could be no second choice, no going back, no forgetting nor any surcease from his desires . . . something seemed to snap in his brain ; he clenched his fist and raised it on high.

"I'll forego neither the girl nor my success," he said aloud from between set teeth. "I'll remove that devil from my path, and I'll win Marion Fay even if I've to wade through hell to do it!"

Again the melodramatic turn of mind was uppermost. He could not see himself defeated, refused to own that anything he had set his heart upon would never be his. So drunk was he with the sense of power that had come to him in these later years, so much a slave was he to the dictates of his over-mastering conceit, that he failed utterly to visualise the absurdity of that declaration. He would wrest his destiny from the hands of Fate: he himself would be the final arbiter!

A look of cunning settled on his face, and once more his mind was busied with schemes.

CHAPTER XII

PREJUDICES

“**Y**OU weren’t very cordial to Marion’s new friend, Billy,” said Mrs. Fay that night to her husband as he sat sipping a whiskey and soda before retiring. “Don’t you like him?”

“Oh, he’s all right. Fine fellow really. Good chap to have with you in a scrap. Looks as though he knew something, too. But he lacks—er—I suppose it’s polish he lacks. Rather blunt. There’s just that fine edge of manner and address missing. Seems pretty sweet on Marion; er—what do you think? Is she impressed that way?”

“What would you do if she was?” and there was an unusual glint of fire in Mrs. Fay’s eyes.

The shipbuilder puffed rapidly at his cigar for a moment or two, restlessly changed his position, and took a sip of whiskey.

“I’d want to stop it, that’s certain,” he said at last. “She can make a better match. There’s Johnny, and of course Margesson.”

“Well, Billy,” said Mrs. Fay spiritedly, “you know what I think of him! I’d rather Johnny had her than anyone, but I’m afraid there’s little hope of that: they’ve been friends too long. As for Mr. Grant, you’ve taken the shadow for the substance. He’s wholly, unspoilably natural, and I never want to meet a finer man. Most of Marion’s friends look like shop window models beside him. Personally, I could not wish for a fitter mate for her. And I’m sure of one thing: if she did marry him, she’d spend the rest of her life in discovering her good fortune, and not,

as so many wives do, in finding out that their idols have considerably more than feet of clay!"

The shipbuilder stared in amazement during this speech, and at its conclusion rose to his feet and looked anxiously down at his wife:

"My dear, you—you're surely not disappointed in *me*, I hope, after all these lovely years? I'll admit I might have clay feet, but, sweetheart, nothing more, surely! God bless my soul, I think I love you better now than ever I did."

Mrs. Fay looked up at him with a gentle smile.

"Don't be foolish, Billy. You know you haven't even got feet of clay."

The shipbuilder laughed, and bent down and kissed her.

"Well, then, what's the trouble?" he asked.

"Why are you so set on this man Margesson? I've told you before Marion hates the sight of him."

Mr. Fay sat down again and rather irritably stubbed his cigar in the ash-tray.

"You are prejudiced, Mary. He's a good sound man. He's got pots of money——"

"And do you think that's going to weigh with our girl?"

"I don't. But I want the chap to have his chance. We know him. His record's pretty clean. But what do we know of this other fellow? Where does he come from? Who is he? I'm a man of the world, my dear, and I don't take anybody on their face value——"

His wife chuckled.

"Well, I looked into his eye, and saw there what I should have wished to see in a son of mine, had I had one. I'm not a woman of the world, Billy, but I'll back my judgment against yours. As for what we know about him, I can tell you this: he's the son of a rich Australian sheep farmer."

"H'm. Satisfactory enough, I daresay. And

Marion? You didn't tell me how she regards him."

"If looks and words mean what they meant when you and I were young, Billy, I should say she's in love with him."

"H'mph!" snorted Mr. Fay: "she would be! But perhaps words and looks don't mean the same as they did. And I tell you, my dear, parents are of no account these days. I don't know what we're heading for. Girls with their powder puffs and lip-sticks and short skirts and knee-breeches and cigarettes—and sleeping alone in bungalows! And when a girl takes a fancy to fall in love with a man she's practically married to him before ever she thinks of telling her parents."

"There, there, my dear man: the girls of to-day are the same in all essentials as ever they were."

"Maybe, maybe; but in the non-essentials there's a huge difference, and I'm not convinced that the change in them hasn't re-acted on the essentials. I'd be happier about Marion, as I've said before, if she wasn't so—so confoundedly self-willed, and would see our point of view and believe we know what's best."

"There's the wisdom of youth as well as of middle-age, Billy. The one comes of experience, the other of instinct. And youth never has believed, and never will believe, that age knows always what's for the best; and youth in my opinion is right. We look at life through different spectacles."

"H'mph! I suppose we do. Well, if Marion wants this chap Grant nothing we can say or do will stop her—and that's a fine comment on the modern maid! But I hope it's only a passing fancy."

"Then we'll agree to differ, Billy," said his wife quietly.

CHAPTER XIII
SHATTERING THE IDOL

MARGESSON struck swiftly. He laid his plans with business-like care and efficiency, and proceeded to carry them out in the spirit of a stage villain.

First he resurrected his former disguise and paid a visit to his quondam accomplice "The Bishop," with whom he apparently had a very profitable interview, for he came away smiling beneath his false moustache. His next move was to drop a hint to Mr. Fay, whom he saw practically every day in the course of business, that the Australian was by no means the impeccable hero he seemed. The shipbuilder took him up at once, and pressed him to be more explicit, begged eagerly for details. Margesson shrugged his shoulders and pretended to be very reluctant to speak ill of Grant; but after a little persuasion volunteered the information that he had seen David in the company of more than one gay woman of the town. Mr. Fay was insistent that he should be told more.

"You are sure of this, Margesson? I want to know exactly what you know. I'm not over keen on this fellow Grant, and I'd take it as a favour if you'd be frank with me."

"Well," said Margesson deprecatingly, "there's no mistaking the 'Lombard Lily,' is there?"

"What? Is he going about with her?"

"I saw them entering 'The Meldon' together last evening."

The shipbuilder laughed cynically:

"He flies high, anyhow. She'll be an expensive bird to dine and wine with."

"Yes. They tell me she's as clever as she's pretty, and plays all kinds of queer little games : a dangerous, fascinating woman."

"H'm! Grant's a dirty dog."

Margesson made pretence to defend him.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Fay. After all, lots of men continue sowing their wild oats right up to the time of their marriage, and turn out none the worse husbands for that."

"Stuff and nonsense, Margesson! I don't agree with you at all. I'm a man of the world, I hope, and not over squeamish in these things; but I've never had any use for the chap who wouldn't play straight with a nice girl. Grant's been hanging around after Marion for quite a while, I believe; and after this I'm going to put a stop to it at once."

"I don't really blame you," said Margesson; "but I'd be glad if you'd keep my name out of it. I didn't wish to play the sneak. I may as well be frank with you: I want to win your daughter's love, Mr. Fay, as I daresay you very well know by now; but I don't ever want it said I took a mean advantage of a rival."

"Oh, that's all right, my dear Margesson," answered the shipbuilder heartily. "I quite understand, and you can depend I shan't mention you at all. I'm only too pleased to have heard of this before the affair had gone too far. You've really done me a service."

Margesson smiled, and was content for the moment to leave it at that.

* * * * *

Mr. Fay went home to a very disturbing interview with Marion. He left the works early in order to see her before she departed for her evening swim. In the presence of her mother he said, quietly and determinedly:

"Marion, I would be glad if you would refuse to see Mr. Grant any more."

"Why?" asked Marion, flushing, and looking rather startled.

"Because I've heard he is going about with loose women."

There was an ominous quiet. Mrs. Fay looked swiftly at her husband, dropped into her lap the jumper she was knitting, and then turned to Marion, who had gone very pale, but in whose dark eyes there shone a fighting gleam.

"I don't believe it," said Marion at last decisively.

"No more do I," chimed in Mrs. Fay with equal decision, as she resumed her knitting. "What club scandal have you been listening to, Billy?"

"How was I to hear of a thing like this at the club?" asked Mr. Fay. "Grant's practically a stranger, and he doesn't move among our set. I've been listening to no scandal."

"Then who told you?"

To save Margesson from implication the shipbuilder now told a lie, and took the whole burden on his own shoulders.

"No one," he answered quietly, "I saw him myself."

"When?" asked both women in unison, and in voices that cut.

"The other evening—going into 'The Meldon' with a woman known as the 'Lombard Lily.'"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Fay in acid tones; "and how do *you* know, Billy Fay, that she is called so? And how do *you* know she's a loose woman?"

This rather staggered the shipbuilder.

"Why—why—" he stammered, "one does know these things without—er—without what one might call first hand knowledge. One gets people pointed out to one."

"H'm."

Again the ominous silence, broken after a lengthy pause by Mrs. Fay :

" I'm not convinced."

Marion got up from her seat and made for the door, not speaking any word. Her father rose and called out as she laid her hand upon the knob :

" Remember, girl, I expect you to obey my wishes."

Marion made no reply, nor did she answer " yes " or " no," nor look behind. With body and head erect, she passed across the threshold and shut the door quietly behind her.

Mrs. Fay hastily set her work down and followed Marion. She found her in the hall putting on her hat.

" Where are you going, dear ? "

" To the bungalow," Marion answered, " and then for my swim."

She did not look at her mother, but smoothed her dress at the front with both hands, her head bent. There was a strange, detached air about her attitude, as though she were looking upon herself with the inward eyes of the soul. Her movements seemed mechanical and involuntary.

" It's not true, dear," said Mrs. Fay gently, putting an arm about her and patting her shoulder. " Dad is mistaken."

" If it were true, then God has made a mistake," was Marion's strange reply, made in a dull, lifeless tone.

Mrs. Fay turned Marion to her with quick, coercive hands, and raised her head until she could look into her eyes. They were expressionless, and gave no hint of the thoughts behind them.

" You don't believe it, girl ? " asked Mrs. Fay sharply.

Marion laughed—a mirthless, pre-occupied laugh :
" If I did, it would be pretty tragic for me, mother."

" Then what's the matter with you, girl ? "

Suddenly a wave of red mounted in Marion's cheeks, and she gripped her mother strongly by the shoulder :

" I've deified him, mother ! He has grown in my heart until he holds it all. I've thought of him as of a knight of old : a man as clean and unsullied as a girl, of the very highest honour. I've exalted him. It's my great Romance, all wonderful as a glorious dream ; and into it this—this ghoul of an accusation is thrown. Can you wonder I'm stunned, hurt, shocked into stupidity ? " She turned away. " Tell dad I'm going to disobey him."

And hastily whistling to her dog she ran out of the house.

Mrs. Fay, very much troubled, returned to her husband.

" Are you absolutely, positively, unmistakably sure of this, Billy ? "

The shipbuilder was already beginning to have qualms. Marion's way of leaving the room had rather startled him. And he was now thinking : had he been too precipitate in accepting Margesson's story ? Hadn't he been guilty of uncharitableness towards the Australian ? He himself was the soul of honour, and it now seemed to his uneasy conscience that he had taken this accusation against Grant rather greedily, and allowed his prejudice to thwart him from a just appraisal of the facts. He was also feeling unhappy about the lie he had told.

" Er—well, my dear, I'm not *absolutely* sure of it. It was only—er—a hasty glimpse I had of them as I whizzed by in the car. There's no mistaking Grant, but he may not have been with the woman. Is Marion taking it badly " "

" She simply doesn't believe it. You've shocked her, though. And I wish you wouldn't be so hasty, Billy. It's one of your worst faults. Marion says she is going to disobey you."

Mr. Fay was feeling more and more uncomfortable,

and the further lies he had told to buttress up the first one were already beginning to hang like millstones on his conscience.

"H'm, h'm,—I'm rather glad she is, in a way," he said. "Perhaps I was over hasty. I should have been fairer to Grant, given him the benefit of the doubt. Er—my dear, I'm sorry. Where's Marion?"

"She's gone to the bungalow."

"Er—er—let's take a stroll. I must see her again. I cannot leave my girl unhappy."

* * * * *

Margesson, however, had gone on to his next move with promptitude. He was fully alive to the fact that he must continue to strike while there was yet time, before Marion was able to see David. He trusted in his luck. From what he had observed and overheard it seemed pretty certain that the lovers only saw each other at week-ends. He had several days in hand.

The following morning he made another appointment with Mr. Fay at the shipyard, and while he and the builder were closeted together the telephone bell rang. Mr. Fay picked up the receiver, and Margesson became suddenly tense and alert. He watched the shipbuilder's face closely.

"Hello, hello!—yes, William Fay speaking—hello!—hang, the wires are crossed! Hello! Hel—" Margesson saw him move perceptibly nearer the instrument as he broke off in the call, and a look as of one absorbedly listening stole over his face. His lips pursed, his brows were knitted. He was experiencing a thing with which all who frequently use the telephone are familiar—he had apparently become an involuntary listener to a conversation between two other subscribers; but he was not to know that it was a conversation engineered by the man who sat in the same room with him, or that it was

a dialogue carried on by two persons at the same instrument. He had heard at first a woman's clear voice, speaking as from a long way off, and then a name had caught his ear.

"—oh, bother!" had come the voice; "hello! I want Mr. Grant, please—Mr. David Grant." A pause, and then a deep voice: "Hello! Grant speaking." "Oh, is that you, Davy? The Lily here. Good morning! How do you feel after last night?" "Like two cents' worth of dirty ice!" said the deep voice. The woman's laughter trilled out. "Never mind; have a pick-me-up. I say, I cannot get Maisie for this evening. You must just put up with me. I'll be along at the ship about eleven. And don't forget the fizz, old dear. There's——"

The speaking abruptly ended. For an appreciable time Mr. Fay held the receiver to his ear, and then slowly set it in the hook and sat back. Margesson pretended to be absorbed in the papers before him, until his attention was called by the shipbuilder saying:

"Gad! Margesson, what do you think I've just heard?"

Margesson looked up enquiringly.

"What?"

"Grant and the 'Lily' on the telephone, making arrangements for to-night on his ship at eleven. The wires were crossed—you know how it sometimes happens—and I couldn't help but hear. The damned skunk! What you told me yesterday is apparently only too true."

He rose from his chair and began to walk about.

"Marion's got to believe it now," he muttered, more to himself than to Margesson. "Poor girl, she'll take it badly. The damned skunk! The damned skunk!"

Margesson looked rather surprised and just a little mortified.

"Is there something really between them, then?" he asked.

"Nothing that you might call serious, so far as I know; but she evidently has a liking for him."

Margesson smiled.

"Oh, we all saw that, Mr. Fay, and we called him a lucky dog. It makes his conduct all the more inexplicable and detestable. I put in a good word for him yesterday because I felt I had unwittingly played the sneak; but I didn't realise he was quite the incorrigible libertine he seems to be. His pursuit of Marion now becomes nothing less than an insult."

"It does, Mr. Margesson; it does."

Mr. Fay's distress was very patent. He walked agitatedly about the room.

"You know, Margesson, it almost seems too damnable to be true. I cannot think my girl could make such a mistake in a fellow, and from what I saw of him he didn't seem quite the waster that this makes him out to be."

"You can easily prove it, Mr. Fay," suggested Margesson with admirably assumed diffidence. "Why not visit the ship yourself and see? It's your duty to make sure before you wholly condemn one of Marion's friends."

The shipbuilder paused.

"I will, by gad! I'll take your advice. I'll satisfy myself once and for all."

Margesson bent to his papers to hide the smile of triumph that forced itself to his lips. The scheme had gone without a hitch.

* * * * *

When Mr. Fay returned home that evening almost the first words he uttered after he had crossed the threshold were:

"Where's Marion?"

Mrs. Fay, who had come into the hall to greet him,

as was her wont, looked up into his stern, unsmiling face, and knew that this time there was something tragically serious afoot.

"She's gone to the bungalow, Billy. What's the matter?"

He led her into the dining-room and told her. She went white and drawn, and sat down suddenly.

"Oh, Billy," she whispered: "it just about destroys my faith in men. I'd have pledged my soul and honour on David Grant . . . it will kill Marion. She's hopelessly in love with him, Billy."

"What?" cried Mr. Fay; "she hasn't—hasn't let it go so far as that?"

"Yes, though there's nothing definite between them."

Mr. Fay sat down beside his wife and took her hand.

"My dear, my dear, it's terrible. I'd no idea our girl had—Mary, it all comes of this accursed modern notion of letting our children go about with unlimited freedom. It's like turning them loose into a wild country. They're not fitted to look after themselves like men."

"I'd never, never have believed it; I can hardly do so now. I keep seeing him, so fine, and straight, and healthy; so clean and hard and vigorous, truth in every line of him, and gentle with women as I've never seen a man before. Now isn't he, Billy? Did you see anything raffish, or dissipated, or lewd about him? Oh, it all seems wrong; and yet that conversation! Surely there must be another David Grant, another ship——"

"There isn't, my dear. I thought of that, and enquired of all the vessels in dock; there's not a David Grant among them. But to be absolutely certain I'm going to visit the ship myself, to-night, though there doesn't seem to be any possibility of a mistake."

Mrs. Fay was silent awhile.

"It's as Marion said last evening," she whispered at last: "God himself has made a mistake!"

The shipbuilder looked distressed.

"How?—what did she mean?"

"It was a queer thing to think or say; but I fancy she meant, without blasphemy, that God really had made a mistake, and created a soul that doesn't fit the body He put it into—something strange like that."

"H'm." The shipbuilder got heavily to his feet. "I wonder how Marion will take it, now that there is this indisputable evidence? Er—should we tell her at once, my dear?"

Mrs. Fay sat thoughtful for a while.

"Yes, Billy. It isn't fair to keep her in ignorance, and to be—sort of spying on her friend without her knowledge."

"That's what I thought, Mary. We'd better send for her."

Half an hour later the sound of swift steps running up the gravelled drive came to the ears of the father and mother as they sat waiting by the open window of the drawing-room, and they saw Marion, her face white and anxious, take the stone steps leading to the front door three at a time. A moment later she burst in upon them, her breast heaving.

"What—what is it?" she gasped.

Very gently, very much distressed, they told her. She stood during the recital, which was full of pauses, erect and tense, and into the smooth skin of her forehead two puckers came and stayed; the whiteness of her face spread even to her nostrils, her dark eyes grew misty with pain. When they had finished, she walked to the window, and stood looking vacantly out. They watched her with anxious eyes, saw her straight, lissom body sag and droop; then suddenly she wheeled upon them:

"I shall not believe it until I see it with my own eyes. Father, you shall take me with you to-night."

CHAPTER XIV

THE LOMBARD LILY

DAVID and Jimmy Drake had spent an evening uptown, and had sauntered idly back to the ship, contented and happy : David because he was living on the crest of the wave, and Jimmy because the evening had been almost a "purple" one. He was consciously glowing under the influence of a recklessly mixed quantity of champagne and whiskey which would have induced in most men a desire to lie down in the nearest gutter. But Jimmy had never been drunk in his life, "and I don't want to be," he used to declare ; "but a chap likes to get a kick from his liquor ; likes to feel mellow ; and what it costs me to get to that state would keep a navvy in beer for a week. They made my head of mahogany as well as my face."

As the pair stood by the dock-side waiting for the boat which was to take them across to the ship David said :

"I think I'll run the old packet in the coast-wise trade, Jimmy. Might as well be letting her earn her keep."

Jimmy rocked on his heels.

"That's good news, Dave. There isn't a blame job I can give the hands now, unless we start gold-platin' the anchor. D'ye know what it's cost you in paint and gear since we laid up ? "

"Pretty well," David laughed. "But if I wanted to sell her she'd fetch double the amount she'd have done two months ago. She's in right good trim, and looks as pretty as a picture. I'll try and dig

up a nice clean freight, and you can run her up and down the coast while——”

“While you go chasin’ the rainbow.”

“Not a bit of it, old son,” answered David cheerfully. “I’m chasing something more tangible than that, and overhauling it hand over fist.”

“I tell you you’re sellin’ your birthright for a mess of pottage, Dave,” replied Jimmy oracularly. “You’re not the marryin’ kind. I’ll feel very sorry for that girl if you do get her, for d’ye think marriage’ll root you in one place? Don’t you believe it. You’ve got the itchin’ heel, and the best woman breathin’ will never salve it. And anyhow, if you’re gettin’ along as fast as you say you are, you can take my tip you’ll pile up on some rocks presently. A woman easily won’s a woman easily lost; an’ a boastin’ tongue where love is concerned is a tongue waggin’ in the mouth of a fool. I’m talkin’ for your own good, Dave, an’ not tryin’ to be insultin’! I’m older than you, and wise with women.”

“Thanks, Jimmy,” chuckled David; “but you’ve got it a bit mixed, haven’t you?—like your drinks. If you sort it out in the cool of to-morrow morning, and put it down on paper, you’ll realise what a potent thing a segregated, elongated cocktail of whiskey and champagne is.”

Jimmy snorted, and began rocking on his heels again.

“I’m sober, Dave; I’m that sober I could take those two words you used and spell them backwards. I’m at peace with all mankind, which includes women, and I tell you that what I said just now is good English, and full o’ wisdom. I know women, and I know life: it’s a gift our family’s got. We’ve had it ever since our ancestor played bowls on Plymouth Hoe!”

Jimmy’s belief in his descent from the great sea-rover whose name he bore only came to the surface when he had drunk enough strong liquor to float it

there. In his every-day moments he would admit that Sir Francis Drake was his hero, his greatest man of all time, and would content himself by obliquely drawing attention to the fact that he himself was called Drake, and that his forbears had originally hailed from Devon. He left it there, for his hearers to draw the obvious conclusion.

After, as he thought, getting David dead on the wicket with his last speech, Jimmy chewed jauntily on his cigar, and seemed to grow in stature. With hands thrust deep into the pockets of his reefer jacket, he set his elbows out, and stuck his square chin into the air. David slapped him suddenly on the shoulder, so that Jimmy nearly fell off the dock-side.

"All right, James," David laughed. "We'll allow that what you say goes. What then? What do you advise? Is love a snare and a delusion?"

"Love isn't," replied Jimmy, "but marriage is!"

"Why, you old reprobate, that's sheer moral subversion, abominable and callous cynicism, a traduction of the most sacred institution of human life!"

Jimmy came down on his heels with a thump.

"You talk like a Sunday paper, Dave, and your English isn't nearly as good as mine. What I said is what I—me—believe to be true; and you'll come to my belief before you are through with this business. I'm only sorry for you, Dave; you're a fine man and a great friend, and I'll hate to lose you. But I'm not jealous, so don't think it. I'm at peace with all mankind, which as I said includes women——" the boat drew up at the steps, and at the same moment a light patter of running feet was heard, at which Jimmy wheeled about, and then finished his speech: "and here's one o' them coming, or I'm a flat-footed Swede."

In the dim light of a lamp some distance away they beheld the slight, graceful figure of a young woman running swiftly along the dock-side towards

them ; and could they have peeped at that moment behind one of the nearby timber-stacks they would also have seen the peering face of Margesson, disguised in his false moustache and horn-rimmed spectacles. The woman was the notorious " Lombard Lily," with whose name Margesson had already worked such dire havoc. She was there to play a part under his instructions. His accomplice " The Bishop " had recommended her to him. Beautiful, unscrupulous, clever, she was the acknowledged queen of the underworld of Bede, and as such was well known to the infamous Jacob Priest, although the orbit of her activities was generally far removed from this. She was always expensively and exquisitely dressed, spoke with a refined accent, frequented the more select restaurants and night-clubs of the town, and took toll of its leisured and moneyed classes. For a heavy price she had engaged in this work of Margesson's. He could not have found a more suitable agent, nor one who would have entered into the affair with greater spirit and readiness. It was a job that required wits and beauty ; she had both, and rejoiced in the opportunity to exploit them.

Margesson's scheme required her presence on the schooner at or before eleven o'clock that night. He had taken a chance in fixing it for that time, for there had been just the possibility that neither David nor Jimmy would be aboard then. But his luck was in. Having been informed by " The Bishop " himself that the two men had gone uptown earlier in the evening, he had had time to set the stage and have his chief performer ready for her cue in good time ; and it so fell out that when David and Jimmy reached the point where they waited for the boat it wanted a few minutes of half-past-ten. Margesson behind his timber-stack had chuckled gleefully. His star was most assuredly in the ascendant !

As the woman came running towards the spot where

David and Jimmy stood gazing in her direction, she held out her hands imploringly, and then cast a furtive look behind her.

"Oh, save me," she gasped, putting her hands on Jimmy's shoulder and literally hanging on him. "Hide me! Somewhere, anywhere! I'm in deadly peril." Her hand reached out and clasped David's arm. "You look good and kind—have pity."

"What's the trouble, darlin'?" asked Jimmy, holding her unnecessarily close, "stole something and got the cops after you?"

"Oh, no, no! I'm pursued—Russian spies! Hide me somewhere and I'll tell you all. You are going on your ship, aren't you? Take me with you—just for an hour or two, until I throw my pursuers off the scent. Quick! oh, be quick! If they catch me I'm done."

She still held on to Jimmy's shoulder, looking piteously up into his face. He swayed slightly, and clasped her more firmly about the waist; then he gazed up at David, grinning.

"What about it, Dave? I say 'yes' myself, for I'm at peace with all mankind, I am, which includes women more'n ever it did."

David stared grimly down at the woman, then looked along the dock-side in the direction from which she had come.

"I hear no pursuers," he said; "you've already thrown them off the scent."

"No, no, I haven't," said the "Lily," with a convulsive gasp; "you don't know them. They are hounds—vultures. They are not far away. Oh, be quick!"

At that moment, in the distance, the faint sound of running feet came to their ears—the woman had seen to that; her accomplices were doing their specified work.

"It's they!" she gasped, clinging desperately to Jimmy. "Oh, make your friend hide me."

David suddenly became all concentrated energy.

"It sounds a cock-and-bull story—but there's someone running. Let's have no fuss. Into the boat with her, Jimmy."

They quickly bundled her down the steps, and of her own activity she got into the boat.

"Kneel down and bend your head," ordered David. "We'll shield you from view by standing up close together." Then to the sailor in charge: "Bend to it, and let her rip."

When they had gone about twenty yards David, who all the while was looking intently over his shoulder, saw two men appear dashing along the dock-side. They paused, leaned out over the water with gaze trained in the direction of the boat, and then one of them shouted:

"Seen anything of a woman?"

"Yes," answered David swiftly, "she's just disappeared behind that stack of timber," pointing further along towards where the lamp shone. Without a word the two men made off.

"Oh, thanks," murmured the "Lily," "you are so good!"

"Stay where you are until we reach the ship," ordered David gruffly, unheeding her expressions of gratitude.

* * * * *

As the boat passed on into the shadows of the dock the be-spectacled Margesson, a smile of triumph on his face, came out from behind the timber stack, ran swiftly to the steps, clambered down and silently lowered himself into the water, and followed slowly in the wake of the boat. Arrived at the schooner he waited a little while, treading water; and then climbed up the Jacob's ladder to the deck. Fortune again favoured him. The sailor had gone forward, the others were in the cabin, and the deck was deserted.

Quickly he stole to the after-hatch, loosened with feverish fingers the tarpaulin fastenings, slipped one of the battens aside, and then climbed into the hold, to carry out the last phase of his plot—a phase which he had decided none but he could be trusted with. A few minutes later he re-appeared, looked carefully about him, and then made for the side. A moment later he was swimming back to the steps, from whence he once again vanished into the timber stack, in whose dark recesses he quickly changed into the dry clothes he had provided ; after which he hung about to wait on events.

* * * * *

In the meanwhile, on reaching the cabin of the schooner, to which she had been supported by the solicitous Jimmy, the "Lily" gently disengaged herself from his arm, murmured a soft-voiced thanks, looked about her with eyes still scared and hunted, and then fell with a crash to the floor in a perfectly simulated faint.

"Oh, my God!" exploded Jimmy as he stooped to pick her up, "she'd have to do that, of course. They all conk-out on the slightest provocation—lend a hand, Dave! I get troubled with my centre of gravity when I stoop—it's that cocktail! I never feel it so long as I've got my chin up."

David shouldered Jimmy out of the way, and himself lifted the woman and laid her gently on the settee. Her head slid helplessly back and rolled to one side.

"Get the brandy," said David. "She's been scared, all right."

Jimmy dived for the bottle, and then in his turn shouldered David aside.

"I'll fix her, Dave. I understand 'em; and I'm a married man!"

He had possessed himself of a spoon, and now

inserted the handle of this between the "Lily's" clenched teeth and prised them open.

"Stroke her throat, Dave," he said; and while David did this Jimmy poured a little of the liquor between her lips.

"Seems rough treatment, Jimmy," commented David. "You use that spoon like a burglar's jemmy."

"No use playin' about it," was his reply. "They like to be man-handled a bit. There you are: she's swallowed some, and is comin'-to."

The "Lily" had choked down her gasp for as long as was physically possible; but when nature made her abrupt demand she coughed violently, gulped, wheezed, gasped again, and then opened her eyes. She was still the consummate actress, and her vacant expression was admirably effected. After staring at the two men for a moment she sat up suddenly:

"Oh, I remember!" she cried. "Where are they? They didn't get me? Ah——"

And with a sob of relief she sank back again upon the settee. Jimmy bent and held the bottle.

"Drink a little more of this, dearie. It's the—the absolute goods; French cognac with a kick in every drop."

But David stayed him as he was about to hold the bottle to her lips.

"Remember your manners, Jimmy. The lady is able to drink out of a glass now."

"It tastes just as good out of the bottle," muttered Jimmy, a little abashed, but nevertheless reaching for the glass that David held out to him.

The "Lily" drank off the brandy at a gulp, as she might have done a dose of medicine, and then handed the glass to David with a pretty gesture and a word of thanks. She smiled wanly at him:

"I feel better now; and oh! I'm so hungry—I've had nothing to eat since breakfast."

"Dig up some grub, Jimmy," said David at once.

"I'm afraid, Miss, that the galley fire will be out, so I cannot give you a cup of tea. Could you drink a bottle of beer?"

"Thank you," she smiled, sitting up, "you are so good. I'll be glad of the beer, but it's really something to eat I want."

David himself laid the table, and Jimmy rifled the ship's store-room, and soon an appetising meal of tongue, pickles, tomatoes, marmalade, white bread, biscuits and cheese was set out. Jimmy surveyed the spread, and then looked at the woman.

"There you are, Miss; that's the best we can do."

"Oh, it's lovely," she cried, clasping her hands, her eyes beaming. "May I begin?"

"Sure—right away."

She stood up and very calmly divested herself of her coat and hat. She looked very dainty, very feminine, in her well-cut skirt and silk jumper. She crossed to a mirror and gave her hair a touch here and there, took from her bag powder and puff and dabbed her nose and cheeks, and then wheeled about to the table, smiling winningly. With a little bow she seated herself.

"You'll join me?" she asked of both men.

"No—I speak for myself," answered David, busily carving the tongue. "I had a good dinner not so long ago. Jimmy? —"

"By rights I should be in bed, Dave, but since I'm not I'll certainly have another feed."

David gave the woman a liberal helping, plied her with pickles and tomatoes, and rather curiously watched her begin wolfishly to eat. She was really hungry, having denied herself of all food since lunch the better to act her part. There was no pretence about the way she attacked the meal, and she only spoke to thank the one or the other of them as they did the honours of the table. She asked for a second portion of tongue, and consumed a great quantity

of bread. When she had at last eaten her fill she sat back with a sigh, and lifted her glass.

"I've not enjoyed a meal so much for many a day," she said with perfect truth, smiling first on one and then on the other. "Here's to you, my benefactors."

She took a little sip of beer, and then set her glass down.

"And now I suppose you are burning to hear my story."

David pushed the cheese and biscuits across to her.

"Take your time, Miss; finish your supper. We are certainly curious—I am, at any rate. But I fancy my friend here is only burning to assist you and pay you the deference due to your sex. Your story is of secondary importance to him!"

Jimmy smiled fatuously, and drained his glass.

"None o' your joshin', Dave."

The woman laughed.

"And you?"—to David: "are you not also burning to pay me the dues of my sex?"

"Not he," cut in Jimmy. "He has no use for ladies—only one—er, sorry, old man," he finished lamely as David turned fiercely and stared at him with frowning eyes.

Once again the "Lily" gave forth her low, musical laugh.

"Ah, I see. Only one! How faithful! And lucky girl to have so constant and so magnificent a lover!" She gazed at David with frank admiration. "But still, a man should have many experiences. He narrows himself by a too scornful and indifferent attitude towards other women."

"That," answered David unsmilingly, searching her face with keen eyes, "is a matter on which opinions are of course bound to differ. But I imagine most people would think it queer for one in your plight to be trying to mix coquetry with this business."

"A woman's never too embarrassed for that," she retorted, smiling. "The Eve in her is always uppermost. You are very naïve; and your words prove the truth of what I said. I don't think your friend here sees anything queer about it."

"Naïve or not," retorted David bluntly, "I think it would better become you if you refrained from labouring the point and got on with your story."

The "Lily" frowned for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"But that's just it—you pique me so! I want your—your deference all the more because you refuse it!"

"Say rather that you want my admiration."

"Well, your admiration, then."

David sat back with an air of resignation, and looked at Jimmy.

"You talk to her, Jimmy. You understand 'em better than I do."

The "Lily" leaned forward and put her arms on the table, laughing. She was about to speak when a creak from the companionway drew her eyes past David. Then she said quite loudly:

"You are very rude, Davy!"

David had not heard the sound behind him—he was gazing across the table at the woman, his brows knitted in a deep frown, startled by this familiar use of his name. But Jimmy, who sat sideways to the companion ladder, had heard and caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. He slewed round, and half started from his seat with a sudden exclamation.

"Good Lord, Dave!"

David wheeled about in his swivel chair, and what he beheld brought him like a shot to his feet. Marion and her father stood framed in the doorway. She was white to the lips; scorn, contempt, deep humilia-

tion, suffering, and pride were mingled in her attitude and expression. Her eyes were on the woman. Mr. Fay gave a hard laugh.

"You see, Marion? Come away. We obviously intrude. That woman is the 'Lombard Lily,' and she calls him 'Davy.'"

He whisked her about, and began to lead her up the stairway.

"Stay!" thundered David, starting forward.

Marion turned, and looked at David with eyes now blazing in a cold fury of anger.

"Well?" she said.

"You've seen," cried David, his mind thrashing about for the explanation of this strange visit. He could understand nothing of it, but he sensed only too well that there was some connection between it and the presence of the "Lily," and that a grievous wrong had come upon his love affair. "You've seen," he said, "but you do not ask for the explanation."

"There is nothing to explain," she answered in a voice of ice. And turning, she hastened up the stairs.

In the cabin the eyes of David and Jimmy met across the table. Wonder, puzzlement, doubt were in each other's gaze. David stood rigid as a statue, while he listened to the sound of Marion and her father crossing the deck and climbing down the Jacob's ladder to their boat. When the rattle of oars died away David whispered:

"Can you beat it, Jimmy? What—what in hell does it mean?"

He sat down suddenly, and clenched his fist, and struck the table a mighty blow.

"But she believed that of me—of us!"

He glanced across at the woman, who still sat back in her chair, a disdainful, sneering smile upon her lips. With tigerish swiftness David rose from his seat,

moved round the table, seized the "Lily" by the arm, and yanked her to her feet.

"Who and what are you?" he thundered. "He—that elderly gentleman—called you the 'Lombard Lily.' What does that mean? What is your real business here?"

The woman writhed in his grasp, and her mouth twisted in pain.

"Let me go," she cried. "You hurt."

David flung her roughly into her chair again.

"It's no more than you deserve. Come, out with it! What's the game you are playing?"

"If you haven't the wit to see, then I'll leave you to find it out. I'll make you pay for your lack of deference!"

David wheeled away with his fists clenched.

"For God's sake put her ashore, Jimmy, or I'll lay violent hands on her."

He passed out of the cabin, and a moment later was on deck, pacing fiercely up and down.

Jimmy, very much subdued, and looking now with hostile eyes upon the woman, gruffly bade her put on her coat and hat.

"And hurry, you female viper," he growled.

The "Lily" turned about to do his bidding with a nonchalant shrug of her shoulders, and with a reproachful, "*Et tu, Brute!*"

"Brute?" exploded Jimmy angrily. "Aren't you just the damned limit? Come on out of it, pronto, or you'll begin to think I *am* a brute!"

He shepherded her roughly towards the companion-way, and once on deck took her forcibly by the arm and led her to the Jacob's ladder.

"And you can blinkin' well climb down yourself," he growled.

"Charmed, I'm sure," was the woman's smooth retort, as she went over the side and nimbly descended

to the boat. Jimmy followed, and in silence rowed her to the dock-side.

"Good-bye-ee, Jimmy," she said: "and tell your friend that things were never so bad but they might be worse. He's too fine a man to waste himself on one woman."

She was about to step out of the boat when Jimmy seized her by the arm.

"Just a minute, madam. You've made several different kinds of fools of us both, besides doing my friend a heap o' dirt. It looks like a plot. That young lady's dad seemed too wise about it all, and called you something that sounded like 'Lombard Lily.' Now you cannot say but that we acted pretty white when we thought you were in trouble; and, even if you've no more sense of decency than a hog you still ought to be feelin' pretty mean just now. In case you are, just tell me one thing—is a chap named Margesson at the bottom of this?"

The woman looked fixedly at him for a moment and then she said with a low laugh:

"Do you mean the Mayor?"

"Yes."

"Oh dear, no!"

And with that she twisted herself from Jimmy's grasp and climbed out of the boat and up the dock-side from whence she quickly vanished into the darkness.

Jimmy rowed thoughtfully back to the ship.

CHAPTER XV
AFIRE FORE AND AFT

WHEN Jimmy Drake got back to the ship he found David still pacing fiercely up and down.

"Well?" said he, turning from his walk to confront his mate. "What do you make of it?"

"Margesson," said Jimmy quietly.

"Exactly," said David grimly.

"I asked her if he *was* at the bottom of it, but she said not."

"He'll have paid her well enough to earn her loyalty. But doesn't it beat hell, Jimmy? He had it planned like a stage piece. Come on down and have a spot of whiskey. I feel tired."

He led the way to the companion ladder, and Jimmy followed, wondering at that last word.

"Tired?" he asked when they had reached the cabin, and David was pouring out a stiff tot; "how tired, Dave? You mean sleepy? You do look tuckered out."

"Not sleepy, Jimmy," said David. His face was drawn, and there were stern lines about his mouth. It was not the smiling face that Jimmy knew so well. In the usually humorous eyes were pain and weariness. He gulped his whiskey down, and sat heavily in his chair. For a long while he stared at nothing. Then presently he spoke, and his tones were those of a man who has been deeply hurt and wronged.

"She believed that of me, Jimmy. She believed I was so unclean as to court her and paddle about in the muck at the same time. She came down here

to prove the truth or falsehood of what some skunk had told her. She had little faith. She couldn't believe what her eyes and ears and her native common-sense have been showing her these last two months. Couldn't she have waited and asked me? But she had no faith; my word would not have been enough. . . . and I know she was beginning to love me. I've seen it in her eyes a dozen times. But love like that isn't good enough for me. I'd never have *thought* of doubting her, even if a bookful of evidence had been produced. I'd have said it wasn't true, and asked for her explanation and believed it. She didn't ask for any word at all; she refused it when I offered it. Jimmy, I haven't sold my freedom for a mess of pottage, as you put it; for I've got it here right now, and I'm keeping it. I'm through; but I'll not know contentedness for many a day: the dream I'd cherished was too—too lovely."

Jimmy sat abashed, looking at David with the affectionate eyes of a dog, but unable for the moment to say a word. At last he stammered:

"But, Dave, aren't you goin' to see her and try to put the thing right?"

"I'm not. It isn't worth putting right."

"But—but, man, you don't know her side of the affair. You don't know how her mind was poisoned. She might have had faked evidence that would have convinced the best woman breathing."

"I thought she *was* the best woman breathing. And she had the evidence here, hadn't she? She believed what she saw, because she had been persuaded to look for what she did see."

"Devil take it, Dave," exploded Jimmy, "you're seeing it all wrong." He got up and came round to David, and put an arm affectionately about his shoulders. "Son, don't chuck your hand in. You ask for too much. Take the good that's there. She is a good 'un—one o' the best, I should say."

and when you get 'em like that they're worth keeping. Dave, I've barged a lot about women in a way I didn't always mean, but I'm serious now. And if you're hit so badly, isn't it worth while fightin' to keep *your* faith? If you've got an apple with a bit of bruise on it you don't throw the whole thing away because it's not perfect—you cut the bruise out and enjoy what's left. You—oh, damn!"—he sighed in despair, gripped David's shoulder, and went back to his seat, for David had shaken his head decisively.

"I've never set her up to be perfect, Jimmy. I'm not a school-boy busy with his calf-love. I only ask of her, as I'd ask it of you, of anyone I counted a friend, faith, belief in me. She knows me. I've talked to her, revealed myself to her as I've done to nobody else in the world. She must think now that I've been telling her lies, nay, living them, these past months; inventing beliefs and hopes and aspirations merely to tickle her ear. She must think me an impostor, a glib-tongued scoundrel, as well as a cad without a vestige of moral principle. And do you think I'm going to her, and she thinking all that, and humbly beg——"

"No, Dave," chimed in Jimmy with energy, "but you can go proudly and tell her the simple truth; and then if she doesn't believe in you why I guess she *isn't* worth it."

This made David thoughtful.

"Yes," he muttered after a pause, "I could do that. Perhaps it is asking too much for utterly blind faith. But it's blind faith she should have had. No, Jimmy, I don't think I'll go."

Jimmy lifted his hands in despair.

"Well, sleep on it, Dave. You'll mebbe see reason to-morrow. But there's one thing you can tell me to give *me* peace of mind. You'll be letting Margesson have all that's coming to him?"

David's mouth set in a grim line, and then he laughed, a hard, bitter laugh.

"Sleep in peace, Jimmy. I'd decided before you came back that I'd fix Margesson, and then we'd hike back to the South Seas."

Jimmy stood up, and yawned.

"That's the ticket, son. And now it's me for bed. And we'll resume this to-morrow morning." He paused—"haven't you been finding it rather warm these last few minutes?"

"I have, rather."

Jimmy began sniffing.

"And don't you smell something burning?"

David jumped to his feet with a sudden spring, and his nostrils expanded as he sniffed the air.

"Suffering cats!"

With half-a-dozen tigerish leaps he was on deck. Jimmy followed more leisurely. As he emerged from the companionway he saw David at the main hatch, ripping away the tarpaulin. Clouds of smoke were rolling up into the air. Jimmy dashed forward to help, and quickly they had the hatch battens off. Acrid fumes swirled about them as they peered down into the hold. The dense smoke was shot through by leaping flames, and the crackle and hiss of fire came up to their ears.

"My God! she's fore and aft!" said David in a tense, quiet voice. He was the cool, collected man of action again. "Off you go to the Harbour Master's office, Jimmy, and report. Get the Fireship here quick. Thank the Lord she's handy. I'll rouse out the hands and have the pumps away. I reckon we can just about keep her under."

Before David had finished speaking Jimmy was over the side, and in a trice was rowing as for bare life to the steps. David ran to the fore-castle and wakened the men.

"Look alive! The ship's afire—all hands to the pumps."

He dashed back, in his quick, lithe way, to the waist of the ship, and when the men came tumbling out in their drawers and socks he already had the fore-hatch lifted and the two small pumps primed, with the suction hose ready over-side.

"It's fore and aft," he said to the bo'sun. "You take one nozzle and play her down the fore hatch; I'll look after the other. Now, men, we've got to beat this. I've sent Mr. Drake for the Fireship—she ought to be here soon; but while we're waiting you've got to pump as if your lives depended on it. Let her go, then."

The men bent to it with a will, and to the measured clank of the pumps a quick, spurting stream of water came from the fire nozzles.

"Direct it for'ard, bo'sun, and play on the sides. I don't think she's got much of a hold yet; narrow it down."

"Ay, ay, sir."

But David had been altogether too optimistic. In a fight he always showed to advantage, and no odds were ever too great to daunt his enthusiasm. The fire was much more serious than he would admit; and the Fireship a great deal longer in coming than he had anticipated. And the two streams of water from the pumps seemed pitifully inadequate. As one of the hands phrased it in a muttered undertone:

"The skipper's purty cheerful, but I reckon the ol' hooker's sailed her last v'y'ge—it's like tryin' to put the fires o' hell out wi' a syringe. If we saves her there'll be precious little but charcoal left. These wooden ships burns fierce when they once gets a hold."

And in spite of all their efforts the clouds of smoke rolled up from the hatchways in ever denser quantities, the crackling and hiss below grew louder, the flames

increased. Soon the pitch in the deck seams began to bubble, and smoke suddenly came pouring up from the cabin. David set his hose down and ran to the companion ladder. One look sufficed ; the saloon was a raging furnace. He turned back to the men and said quietly :

“ Get the lifeboat out, and start piling your dunnage into her. A dozen Fireships couldn’t save the ship now.”

The men obeyed him with alacrity. David leaned against the bulwark, and grim, sombre lines set themselves upon his face.

“ It was fore and aft,” he kept thinking ; “ it was no accident.”

The cabin skylight suddenly fell in with a crash, and sparks and great tongues of flame shot up. The heat grew intense. The flames played about the main-sail boom, flickered, reached higher, and then the furled mainsail took fire. Soon tongues of flame were licking at the rigging, running points of flame mounted higher and higher as rope after rope caught hold ; flames burst through the deck seams. The main-mast dipped with a loud report.

“ Over the side everybody,” roared David when this occurred. He was the last to descend to the boat, and as he pushed off with a vigorous kick the main-mast toppled over, a column of living fire, smashing through the bulwarks and sticking out astern. The lifeboat was backed to a safe distance, and at this moment Jimmy rowed up in the dinghy. He held alongside the lifeboat, where David was standing in the stern-sheets, bare-headed, his eyes fixed on the burning ship. The dock was now lit up from end to end, throwing into clear relief the vessels lying at their moorings. A knot of people had already gathered on the dock-side, and more were coming. Several boats had put off from various steamers, ready to offer help ; but the schooner was past help, as they all

knew. The Fireship at last put in an appearance, with her crew bustling about on deck in preparation for the fight.

"Fireship ahoy!" shouted David: "you're too late! Let her burn."

The flat, squat vessel drifted down with engines stopped, her red painted hull and bright brasswork gleaming in the glare of the flames.

"You the skipper?" a voice called from her deck.

"Ay," answered David.

"We came as quick as we could," replied the voice.

"Sorry we are too late."

"So am I!" answered David curtly.

At this moment a small sculling boat nosed her way alongside the lifeboat. A fair-haired, bespectacled young man was standing up in her. In his haste to be first on the job he had apparently jumped straight out of bed, for as he peered at David his raincoat fell open at the neck, displaying to view the crumpled collar of his pyjama jacket.

"Are you the captain of that ship?" he asked of David.

David turned his head swiftly.

"I am."

"I'm a reporter from the *Observer*."

"You don't look it," said David, eyeing him keenly.

"You've forgotten your bath sponge."

"Can you give me any details?" asked the young man, undaunted, fishing out a notebook.

"Yes," replied David, turning abruptly and fixing his eyes on the ship. "Wood, rope, tar, and paint—burn, when you set fire to them. You may start a fire accidentally in one place, but you're either drunk or a fool if you accidentally start fires in two different places separated by about sixty feet of space. That fire was started in two different places, and we had neither fools nor drunken men aboard. *Ergo*: some-

body deliberately set fire to the ship." He turned once more to the reporter : " Young man, ponder that rightly, and you'll get a column out of it."

" When did you first notice the fire ? "

" When we smelt it."

" Have you any idea who started it ? "

" Yes."

The young man was destined to rise high in his profession, for he possessed in superabundance the necessary qualifications which go to the making of the born reporter—the courage of a lion, the hide of a rhinoceros, the insatiable curiosity of a monkey, and a bloodhound's scent for news. Wherefore, bent upon getting something tangible out of this tall, bleak-faced captain who spoke in tones of bitter sarcasm, he calmly stepped out of his own boat into the lifeboat, and stood upon a thwart confronting David, notebook in hand, pencil poised expectantly.

" I'm right distressed," said David, " you interrupt my view." And reaching out he took hold of the reporter with both hands, lifted him clear of the gunwale, and deposited him in a sitting position in his own boat ; and then with a vigorous shove sent the light craft sailing out ahead. Still nothing daunted, the reporter instructed his boatman to row round to the other side and draw up by the dinghy.

" Are you a member of the crew of that ship ? " the reporter asked Jimmy Drake.

" I'm the mate," said Jimmy.

" Ah, perhaps you can give me some details, then," and he put one foot on the gunwale of the dinghy so suddenly that Jimmy lost his balance, stumbled up against the reporter and swept him into the dock. Jimmy, with grinning face, fished him out and helped him into the hands of his boatman.

" You want to be careful, son," said Jimmy kindly. " Run away home and get dried. We ain't got any news for you ; and you intrude, see ? We thought a

lot o' that ship, and we want to be left alone, for we're none of us over chirpy."

The reporter's ardour was at last somewhat damped, and he had an impression, wholly erroneous, that Jimmy had deliberately pushed him overboard. He sullenly gave orders to be rowed ashore, and when he stumbled up the steps to the dock-side he was assisted by a man in horn-rimmed spectacles and dark moustache. Margesson had been an interested observer of the reporter's efforts after news, and had now seized his opportunity to round off his plot. The reporter, smarting under a sense of injury, was ripe for the veiled hints and suggestions thrown out to him by the stranger; and when he left a few minutes later, running to keep himself warm, he was primed with the story as Margesson would have him know it. The mayor left the scene shortly afterwards, chuckling inwardly, and hugely satisfied at the way things had gone.

Out in the dock David and Jimmy watched the blazing schooner.

"I was as quick as I could, Dave," said Jimmy. "I raised hell at the Harbour Master's, and I must say he was pretty spry. But the Fireship! It took them more'n an hour to find the crew! I did my best, Dave."

"That's all right, Jimmy. I don't think we could have saved her even if the Fireship had been on the job at the beginning. The fellow who set her alight knew his business."

Jimmy glanced sharply at David.

"What do you mean, Dave?—set her alight? That's what you said to that reporter, but I thought you were only joshin'."

"Well, wasn't she fired fore and aft?"

Jimmy gave a sudden hissing intake of the breath.

"Gee! It never struck me."

" I saw it from the beginning—Jimmy, I've not taken that man seriously enough."

" Margesson ? " said Jimmy in a low tone.

" Who else ? "

" But he must be a fool, Dave, or else he's lost his head. If we can bring it home on him, I forget how many years he'll get. But what's his idea ? He'll surely know you're insured."

" I haven't got his idea yet. It's part and parcel of the whole night's work . . . there goes the foremast—and that's about the last of the poor old ' Phantom.' She burned as she sailed—fast. Well, let's get ashore. You fix up the men at the Seamen's Hostel, Jimmy, and I'll go along uptown and book rooms at the ' County ' in MacKenzie Street. They'll have to take us as we stand. Come along as soon as you've got the men fixed."

CHAPTER XVI
SOULS ON THE RACK

"THERE'S the idea, Jimmy," said David at breakfast next morning, as he passed the *Bede Observer* across the table, "and it's devastating enough to satisfy even Margesson."

It was ! The reporter had contrived to drive in his sting very shrewdly, and had been, apparently, aided and abetted by some bright young sub-editor, who had evolved three staring headlines from his inner consciousness :

FIRE AT THE DOCKS.
SCHOONER BURNED TO WATER'S EDGE.
CONVIVIAL PARTY ENDS IN DISASTER.

The report ran to nearly half a column. There were references to " David Grant, owner and master " ; florid descriptions of the spectacle—" Inferno of flames," " masts like pillars of fire " ; " rigging picked out against the velvet sky in tracery of gold " ; eulogistic remarks as to the prompt arrival of the Fireship and her crew's heroic but unavailing efforts to subdue the fire, so that the ship finally burned to the water's edge and sank. The report ended :

How the ship caught fire is a mystery. The captain and mate had been entertaining some lady friends to supper, and it is thought that in the merriment of the moment a match had been carelessly dropped. One of the guests had a very narrow escape from a falling spar. In an interview later with the captain and mate

of the schooner our representative learned that the vessel was partly loaded with oil and tar, which no doubt caused the fire to get the upper hand so quickly.

When Jimmy had finished reading he looked up at David aghast.

"Well, who'd have thought that young feller could have dug so much out of himself. How in thunder did he imagine it all?"

David gave a short laugh, got up from his seat and walked across the room. At the window he stood looking down into the busy street with its thronging populace. A deep frown was on his brow.

"There's been a devilish, cunning hand at work, Jimmy. The whole of that paragraph seems deliberately to stress the position we found ourselves in when Marion and her father came along. It is final and definite proof that we are a couple of dirty dogs, beyond the pale." David wheeled about, and there was a wolfish look upon his face. "And it's my belief that Margesson deliberately fired our schooner merely to round off his plot for my undoing. And by God, he's succeeded."

"Well, and ain't you goin' to get busy settin' this thing to rights, Dave? And when do we start givin' Margesson the glad hand?"

David shrugged his shoulders, and turned about to resume his sombre gazing into the street.

"What's the good of doing anything? I've thought a lot during the night, Jimmy. I haven't had any sleep. She believes me to be—that! It hurts, Jimmy, it hurts. *You* know me. Have I ever gone back on a man? Have I ever played a double game? Do I look, or speak, or act like a rotter? Hadn't she eyes, couldn't she see the thing was impossible?" He began to walk about. "I've tried to see it from her angle, with her delicate, feminine sensibility. But

I come up against it every time. Maybe it's because I cannot unshackle my man's mind; maybe I've not enough imagination . . . well, I've decided to see her and tell her the truth. She'll have had time to think and get back her balance; perhaps she's waiting of me, ready before I speak to say the word that will send me out on the crest of the wave again. I'm hoping so, Jimmy. In the meantime, we'll just let things hang as they are. We could go and raise hell with those newspaper people; we could start giving Margesson the glad hand right now. But I'm in no shape for that sort of business. If Marion's right, then everything's right, and I can afford to laugh at Margesson and his slapstick methods; but if not—why, I'm not sure what I'll want to do, except get away from all this as fast as I can." He came over to the table. "I'm going out now to buy some clothes and gear. Here's a cheque for fifty pounds, Jimmy; you can get busy renewing your own wardrobe with that. See you this evening. I want to be alone to-day."

He strode out of the room, leaving Jimmy perplexed and filled with misgiving.

* * * * *

Marion, too, had spent a sleepless night, and had gone about her work next day in a listless, mechanical fashion. She felt detached from the life and bustle of the school; part of it, yet not of it. The sun shone on happy, flushed faces; but for her it only shone to light the grisly corpse of her happiness stalking relentlessly at her side. Subjectively, she moved amidst the ruins of her dream world. Romance was turned to sordidness; truth lay prone in the mire; the fair flowers of faith and honour were trampled beneath the lascivious feet of lust. The once shining figure of her hero held a leering, distorted cheek to her view, and pointed with mocking fingers at the

symbols by which she had deified him. At intervals throughout the day she kept involuntarily thinking : " It's not true. It's a nightmare. I shall wake presently, and be happy once more."

In the evening she went to her bungalow, telling her anxious mother that she wished to be alone. Instead of bathing she took her dog, and walked along the cliffs to a lonely, sheltered spot, and there sat down, her chin in her hand, looking broodingly over the lazily-swelling waters. A great hunger filled her heart ; hunger for the presence of that David whom she had known in the golden days of her love-awakening. And then came a vision of the scene in the cabin of the schooner : the lounging figure of the woman, without hat or coat, seemingly there on terms of the vilest intimacy. She remembered David's air of amazement, his proud desire to explain, and for an instant doubt assailed her ; but almost at once the words of that hateful paragraph in the *Observer* rose in her brain ; the woman had stayed on ! Even though the account was obviously garbled, there was no mistaking the inference. This man whom she had so glorified was without shame, without a rag of principle or decency ; a hypocrite, a liar, a canting rogue ! She shuddered, a low moan escaped her, and then her head drooped to her quivering arms, and she wept silently.

Presently her tears ceased to flow, and coherent thought returned to her. She raised her head suddenly, defiantly, and cried out : " She called him Davy. And I—I've called him Dave ! He has gone to her—and to how many else besides ; and straight from them he has come to me !—Oh !—"

She clenched her hand, and rose in her outraged pride ; and, storming, her face flushed, her lips set, she began walking fiercely back towards the ravine ; and thus came face to face with him as he rounded a bend in the path. As she confronted him her head

lifted a little higher, her eyes looked scornfully into his.

"I called at the hut," he began in even, steady tones, "and found you were out. Mr. Cossar showed me the way you had taken, and I followed."

"Well?"

At her cold, antagonistic tone his lips tightened; the scorn in her eyes only caused him resentment.

"I see you still believe—that—of me; but you've got to hear the truth."

"I saw it," was her instant reply. "Will you please let me pass?"

She made as if to move to one side of him, but he thrust out an arm and stayed her.

"I said, you've got to *hear the truth*," was his cold reply. "What you saw, as you saw it, was a lie. I'm not asking you, now, to believe it. I came this evening hoping that some little faith in me had returned to you. It is plain it hasn't. I came ready to fight, to fight for my faith in you as well as for your faith in me. I thought, as the hours passed, you'd think a little kindly of me; remember what I had been to you. And instead, this! Well, you've got to hear the truth! Stand, then, and listen."

The mastery of his eyes overcame her, as once it had done before. His voice, though even, rang compellingly. She had nursed her own pride, glorified it; but here was a pride which was the very soul's raiment of the man. It shone forth white and blinding, and struck her with awe. And so she stood, and her will bowed before his. She listened, and deep within her she knew that lies could have no part in the tale she heard. Simply, without comment, without inference, he related the incidents of the night before. It was a faithful, detailed description of what had happened and how it happened, and nothing more. When he had finished he looked down at her, and said:

"You had no faith. What I am, what I had revealed

myself to you, went for nothing. You believed what you saw ; and after twenty-four hours you still believed. Whether you believe now or not makes no difference. I counted you my greatest friend. I loved you, still love you. But from my friends—there have not been many—I have always expected, and always had, belief in my honour. I could expect no less, and no more, of the woman I had hoped would be my wife. Good-bye."

And wheeling suddenly, he strode rapidly away, leaving her dumb, shocked and humbled, rooted where she stood. As his footsteps died away in the distance a quiver came over her. She started forward, hands outstretched, calling : " Dave—oh, Dave ! " She ran frantically a little way, and then pulled up, glancing wildly about her. Something seemed to happen to her knees. She crumpled up and sank to the ground, all her splendid vitality, her suppleness, her wonderful energy gone. She bowed her head in abasement, her soul on the rack.

* * * * *

David went straight back to Bede, and of the first policeman whom he met asked to be directed to the house of the Mayor. He then hailed a taxi and was driven thence. Bidding the man to wait, David went up the short drive, mounted the steps to the front door, and rang the bell smartly. A maid presently appeared.

" Is Mr. Margesson in ? " asked David.

" Yes," replied the maid, " but he's at dinner."

David walked boldly into the hall.

" Which is the dining-room ? " he asked the startled girl.

Involuntarily she pointed to the door.

" Thanks," said David, " he's expecting me on urgent business."

He strode forward, and with a quick, sudden movement passed into the room, locking the door as he shut it.

A middle-aged butler was standing by the sideboard ; Margesson was seated in splendid state, alone, at a massive dining table. The butler looked up, staring, and then glanced at his master. Margesson had, on the instant, half risen to his feet ; and on his face was a look of fear. His conscience told him that vengeance was upon him. David said to the butler, in a fierce voice :

“ If you raise the alarm, or do anything but stand where you are, I’ll smash you.”

And then vengeance indeed came upon Margesson. He had not calculated on this. It had never occurred to him that his enemy would cut straight across all the elaborate mystification he had devised, and seek to deal out justice by his own hand. He had planned on the basis of civilised law and order ; David was replying with the unequivocal methods of the wilds. In a single jump he had reached Margesson, and in less than three minutes it was over and the Mayor lay across the corner of his dining table, a limp and soggy mass of humanity, hurt as he had never in his life before been hurt ; but still alive, still conscious, yet helpless to aid himself. The butler had almost fainted, and his white, puffy face gaped in terror. David said to him, pointing to Margesson :

“ He’s all right. Get some brandy into him. And before you send for a policeman, ask your master if he wants one.” As suddenly as he had come David vanished. He let himself out in the face of a cluster of scared maids who had grouped about the dining-room door, and walking quickly to the waiting taxi ordered the man to drive to the hotel.

He found Jimmy in their room, pacing up and down in quarter-deck fashion. David came in with his quick, decisive action, and reached for his bag.

"I'm catching the first train to London, Jimmy, and from there the first boat to South America. Stay behind and arrange a passage home for the men. I'll give you a letter to close my account on the bank here; there's ample left to cover all expenses. Cable Melbourne to transfer me a thousand pounds to Rio—no; I'll do that myself in London. When you get back to Melbourne fix up about the insurance on the 'Phantom.' Six months from to-day, as near as I can make it, I'll see you in Tahiti. Stay in our old quarters in case——"

But by this time Jimmy had got his tongue unstuck, and broke in:

"Hold on a minute, Dave. She didn't believe, then?"

"I had to use force before she would even listen to me. After that I said what I had to say and came away."

Jimmy sighed.

"You're a queer devil, Dave. You could have waited to see if she saw she was wrong."

"I could; but I'm not built that way. Maybe I am a queer devil; maybe I'm a fool. I've a long time to realise it in."

And he went on with his packing.

"But what about Margesson?" asked Jimmy, rather anxiously. "You're not leaving him to get away with it all?"

"I left Margesson a quarter-of-an-hour ago lying across the end of his dining table with his head in a soup tureen. He didn't seem to be able to do anything for himself except breathe. I left him in the hands of the butler. He's all right, but he'll probably be a sick man for a day or two. That's finished that. If he does think about putting the police on my track for assault, and you're still here, just sail in and give them all the information they want. I'd stay behind myself if I thought he'd do it. And now, just look

up the next train, Jimmy. They'll have a time-table downstairs."

Jimmy thoughtfully went out to do his bidding, and lingered in his descent to the hall.

"It's a true thing you said, Dave," he muttered, "you sure are a fool; and I've got to do something to shift you off the course you're on."

In the hall he addressed the hotel clerk.

"Son, will you just look up the next train for London? And may your bones grow knots in 'em if you tell me there's one soon."

"Next train to London?" said the clerk briskly, as he reached for a time-table. "I think it's the eight-thirty-five."

Jimmy looked at his watch.

"And it's now twenty past eight. He has a quarter-of-an-hour to do it in. He *could* do it; but he won't."

The clerk looked up.

"Yes—eight-thirty-five, sir; restaurant car."

"And what's the next?"

"Er—midnight mail. Eleven-fifty-five, to be exact."

"Thanks, son," said Jimmy, beaming. He returned to their room.

"You've just missed the eight-twenty, Dave," he said blandly. "Next one goes at eleven-thirty-five."

"Damn!" exploded David. He ceased his feverish packing, and began to walk about. Jimmy sat down and leisurely lit a cigar.

"I suppose you quite realise what you're doing, Dave?" he said steadily. "But in case it hasn't occurred to you, do you think it's fair to pile her happiness on the rocks along with your own? You said you thought she loved you. Isn't that something you're responsible for? Something you're morally bound to stand by, instead of taking yourself to pieces and picking out the wrong you reckon she's done you. And you also said you love her. Deuced

queer way of showing it, I must say. And see here, boy. Ain't you sort of putting yourself on a pedestal and standin' back and sayin': 'Goodness gracious me! I'm a mighty fine fellow, and everybody's got to believe it even though a leather-faced hoodlum has emptied a pot o' black paint over my head.' Where in thunder is your sense o' humour, Dave?"

David had wheeled about when Jimmy had begun his speech, and stood still, with a bleak stare on his face, until it was finished. Jimmy knew he had greatly dared, but sat puffing at his cigar and gazing steadily at David.

"You're butting in some, aren't you, James?" said David coldly.

"I am," replied Jimmy. "Now and again you need taking care of, Dave."

David made no reply, but turned about and began his pacing up and down. Jimmy watched him for a second or two, noticed a gradual thoughtfulness come over his face, and felt that his biting words were sinking in. He rose to his feet and leisurely made for the door.

"I'm going out for some baccy, Dave," he said. "Be back presently."

David took no notice, and Jimmy shut the door slowly. But this time he went downstairs two at a time, and crossed the hall to the street almost at a run. Two blocks away from the hotel he hailed a passing taxi.

"Open her up all she knows," he said to the man, "and drive like hell to Frenchman's Gully."

CHAPTER XVII

JIMMY TAKES A HAND

JOHNNY COSSAR had seen David come up the ravine and pass out at the other end; and his vision of that tall figure made him knit his brows.

"There's something wrong," he muttered. "Superbus looks as though he were trying to run away from himself. I wonder what's up."

He had read the account of the fire in the paper that morning, but had seen nothing wrong in it. He had assumed that the ladies referred to in the last paragraph had been Marion and her friends; and he now wondered if that had not been the case, and if David had had difficulty in explaining. Then he shook his head: "No. That wouldn't be it. That chap will always play a straight bat."

He sat at the door of his bungalow, and smoked many cigarettes. His eyes were never very far away from the corner of the path round which Marion would come on her return. He was just beginning to grow uneasy when she appeared, and the sight of her brought him instantly erect. She moved slowly, with drooping arms and listless feet. He watched her anxiously. "There's a devil of a lot wrong," he muttered. Marion did not take the upper path which led to her bungalow, but came on down the side of the ravine, and began to climb towards him. He waited, leaning against the rail of the verandah. Marion came steadily on, head bent. She passed by the front of the bungalow, stumbled up the steps, stood for a moment facing Johnny, and then collapsed into a wicker chair. Johnny turned about to look at her. He gripped hard

upon the rail, and his face was very grave. A lump had suddenly come to his throat. That glimpse of Marion's dark eyes, and her face from which the roses had faded, leaving it white and drawn, had smitten him like a blow. She did not look at him again, but sat with her hands in her lap, twisting upon her handkerchief, and staring down at the floor.

"What is it, old sport?" he asked gently.

Still she did not look up, did not speak; but went on with the insistent twisting, twisting of her handkerchief. He came and stood over her, then knelt and passed an arm across her shoulders. She turned for an instant a tragic face to him, and then bent her head and rested her brow on his arm.

"He has gone away, Johnno," she whispered. "He said 'Good-bye'."

Johnny was silent for a little while.

"That should make me very glad, but—it doesn't."

At this Marion started away, and rose to her feet.

"Oh, I shouldn't have come to you, Johnno. It isn't fair. I—I'll go to mother . . . but she believes, as I believed."

She sat down again. Johnny drew another chair close, and took her hand and patted it soothingly.

"Tell me about it, Marion."

"No, no, Johnny. I shouldn't have come to you. I don't know why I did——"

"Old friends, you know," said Johnny with his whimsical smile. "See here, Marion; if you want my help, ask for it, and don't trouble yourself with any silly sensitiveness about it. We were pals before love came to play ducks and drakes with us; and we are still pals, I hope. I—well, don't let's be sentimental. I know there's a whole lot wrong, for I saw Superbus go tearing up the ravine just now like a fellow who's sacked himself from a good job after telling the boss what he thought of him."

Marion gave him a wan smile.

"Superbus!" she murmured; "and I believed him to be"—she leaned forward: "Johnny, if I saw you in the company of a—a bad woman, would you think it natural that I should believe the worst of you?" She suddenly sat back, staring aghast; "Johno, I know I shouldn't believe that of you—and yet—yet, I was ready to believe it of him!"

"Who? Superbus?"

She nodded.

"Why? Oh, why?" she cried. "I don't understand myself. Why was I so scornful and superior? Why couldn't I have let him explain?"

"Simply because you love him, old sport. Our friend the green-eyed monster. If he'd been just your very good friend you'd have said: 'Hateful creature, to accost Superbus.' You'd have seen her as the pursuer, which of course she is."

"Oh, but it's much more complicated than that," said Marion. And like pent-up waters bursting their barriers the story tumbled from her; and in the telling it seemed that she grew more acutely aware of her utter and senseless lack of faith, for when she had finished she rose from her chair with a sudden lithe movement, full of her old-time energy, and began to pace up and down. "Blind! Blind!" she cried. "I was blind. I was unworthy. I had, indeed, no faith. It seems appallingly clear now . . . he was awful in his pride!" She began twisting her handkerchief again as she walked up and down; "I should have known. He had revealed himself a score of times. I'd gloried in him—and then at the first little test I failed him, ranked him with any low-minded beast whose only god is his evil passion." She sat down suddenly, and moaned: "And now he has gone away. I've lost him. He said 'good-bye'."

Johnny was silent, and presently she seemed to realise that he had said nothing. She looked up.

"You don't say anything, Johno. Was I so terribly,

terribly wrong then? The evidence was so overwhelming. That conversation on the telephone; that woman sitting in his chair, quite at her ease. She called him Davy! Wasn't it natural I should doubt, believe that honour and faithlessness were changeable terms? He said the woman was unknown to him. Then what does it all mean? Where is the mistake? What was she doing there? What was her object? Speak, Johnno. Why don't you say something?"

Johnny started.

"Sorry, Marion. I was thinking. Er—did Grant deny having held that conversation?"

"He neither denied nor affirmed; he just related what had happened that night, and said the woman was an utter stranger."

"Then either he or—your father, is telling lies. Your father said he previously saw Grant with the woman—going into 'The Meldon'?"

"He did." Marion threw up her hands in despair. "Then I've got to believe dad is a liar? But that conversation was true—we proved it to be true!"

"On the evidence, then, it is Grant who is the liar, and an unspeakably unprincipled cad."

Marion turned fiercely on him.

"Do you believe he is—do you believe it?"

"No, I don't. There must be something behind it all, something he could have explained."

Marion stood still as a statue, her eyes fixed on Johnny's face, and presently a frown of thought began to gather on her brow. She turned abruptly, and walked to the end of the verandah, and gazed out across the ravine, which was already filling with the shadows of dusk. He went and stood by her side. She drew a long, sobbing breath.

"Johnno, my doubts come crowding back. That conversation keeps hammering in my brain. It was too vilely familiar—he said he felt like two cents' worth of dirty ice! It's a phrase he might have used! They

laughed. She was to have had a friend of hers on the schooner—a companion for the mate, I suppose. Johnny, is there—was there, anything to explain? . . . oh-h! what am I to believe? I see Dav—him, standing there, as proud as Lucifer, like a king; every inch of him a man! I see him as he has been to me these last two months; and side by side with that this other vision, of a dissembling Satyr, a lying, licentious, unprincipled dog!——”

At this moment a step was heard at the far end of the verandah. Johnny wheeled about and strode along, calling: “Who’s there?”

“Me,” said a deep voice, as the thick-set, stocky figure of Jimmy Drake came into view, making for the steps. “Can you tell me which is Miss Fay’s bungalow?”

“Miss Fay is here,” replied Johnny.

At the sound of Jimmy’s voice and the mention of her name Marion had turned, and now ran eagerly towards him.

“Oh, come up, Mr. Drake. Have you——” then she drew herself erect, and went on with a marked change in her attitude. “Has he sent you?” she finished coldly.

“Meaning Dave?” asked Jimmy as he mounted the steps. “That he hasn’t. I came along to see if I could get some reason out of all this tangle. Thanks,” as Johnny pushed a chair towards him. Marion introduced the two men, and then Jimmy resumed: “No, Dave didn’t send me, Miss Marion. He’s ridin’ his lily-white pride, is Dave, like the cast-iron fool he sometimes is, and intends to start on the eleven-thirty-five hiking it as fast as trains and ships can carry him to South America. That’s why I’m here. Something’s got to be done pronto, or I can see two persons being sorry all their lives. Dave’s like a younger brother to me; he’s more, really, for he’s been the best friend I’ve ever had. But one fault he certainly has got—

his pride is that stiff-necked it's a wonder it doesn't sometimes choke him. I admit he should have been more reasonable and explained things and had them thrashed out ; but because you doubted him he just slings the tiller over and runs afore the wind ; not, mind you, that I don't agree with him that it's a pretty dirty thing you believed of him—and of me, for that matter. But that cuts no ice. *I'm* no painted angel—though as I said to him we couldn't know how your mind had been poisoned, or the circumstances that brought you to the ship last night, any more than we knew what the woman was after, except, of course, that it was pretty plain Margesson was at some of his hanky-panky work——”

Marion, who had been listening, with parted lips and eager face, hanging on every word that Jimmy spoke, started violently.

“Margesson?” she exclaimed, in a puzzled voice, though her heart had begun to beat quickly to a glorious hope, “but he has had nothing to do with it! It was dad who saw Dave, who heard the conversation on the telephone——”

“What's that?” ejaculated Jimmy. “Saw Dave? Heard a conversation on the telephone? Look here, Miss Marion, just tell me as quick as you can your side of this business, and then I reckon we can pretty soon sort it all out. We knew there'd been some dirty work, but this telephone business gets me.”

In a few rapid, eager sentences Marion told her story, and when she had finished Jimmy said:

“Well, by thunder, if that doesn't lick all the cock-fightin' I ever saw! Will you take it from me, Miss Fay, that neither Dave nor I ever clapped eyes on that woman before last night? And will you believe that Dave—I've been in and out of a hundred ports with him—never has had any truck with that kind of creature. Indeed, he never could be bothered with women at all, until he met you. He used to

boast of his freedom. I sometimes thought that there was something lacking in him in that respect ; but I suppose he'd just never been touched in the right spot ! And he'd been too busy livin' a man's life and gettin' his fill of adventure ever to trouble himself much with the company of girls." Jimmy rose to his feet, and stared down at Marion challengingly ; " Well, there it is. Do you believe me, or do you not ? "

Marion sprang up, her face now alight with joy.

" Cannot you see I do ? Oh, Jimmy," she breathed, " you've made me so happy I must kiss you ! "

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him heartily, and then jumped back laughing at his comical look of surprise. She turned to Johnny, and cried, half hysterically : " And you, too, Johnny, for you were kind, and believed in him." She turned again to Jimmy. " And now what ? "

" It's up to you, Miss Marion. Before I left Dave I spoke to him in a way that I wonder I had the nerve to, and I believe it sank in. I've a taxi waiting at the top of the Gully. I reckon, if you want him back you've got to swallow your pride and tell him the rest. It's either that, or the eleven-fifty-five ! "

" Oh, rather ! " cried Marion. " Come along. Time's flying. And life's too good and sweet for silly pride."

She grabbed him by the arm and was hurrying him off ; but he gently disengaged himself and stepped back towards where Johnny was leaning against the rail, his serio-comical face grave, and his eyes fixed sadly on Marion.

" Miss Fay said that you believed in my friend," said Jimmy.

" Yes."

" Then I'd like to shake hands with you."

He thrust out his fist in his bluff way, and Johnny shyly took it. His manner seemed to indicate that he thought the act entirely unnecessary.

"It was merely commonsense," he said deprecatingly. "Your friend carries the denial of the affair in his eyes, and that part of the face immediately beneath them. Although one couldn't expect," he added, with a look towards Marion, who was making her way down the steps, "a girl to see it with the understanding of a man."

"Still, it was pretty white of you to defend him, sir; for I can see with half an eye you're stuck on the girl yourself."

"Good Lord!" murmured Johnny with a hunch of his shoulders. "Do I advertise it like that? If you used the whole of an eye perhaps you could tell me my future, Mr. Drake."

Jimmy laughed good-humouredly.

"Well, I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Cossar, and I hope we'll meet again."

"Thanks," said Johnny, "perhaps we may. If you and Mr. Grant intend to assist our melodramatic friend Margesson to achieve his destiny, and want any help, look me up. He's the only man I ever wanted to hit just for the fun of the thing."

"That goes, son," said Jimmy heartily. "Good evening."

~ * * * *

In the taxi on the way to town Marion said to Jimmy:

"I cannot understand why I never thought of Margesson. Dave and I once agreed that he spelt danger. But coming as the story did from dad, there was no real reason at all to connect the Mayor with it, though my intuition should have led me to think of him. But it's all a mystery how he carried out his diabolical scheme without showing his hand, unless he and dad were partners in it—and I'll never for a moment believe that."

"He's a cunning devil," said Jimmy.

"He's a futile, traitorous fool," said Marion, with a

sudden flash of indignation, "acting the film villain and thinking he'd win when Dave was out of the way . . . well," she went on with a laugh, snuggling down in the seat, and with heightening colour: "he hasn't won, and I'm beginning to gather up the threads of my poor little romance again. Oh, Jimmy," her eyes were shining excitedly as she turned to him; "You'll never know how grateful I am for your goodness, and your—your brotherly care for Dave. People in love are half daft, I think. Dave and I have acted like a couple of children, but I'm the worst sinner. I *knew* he was all you so royally said he was, and yet I believed him false. My world seemed to have stood itself upon its head; it had got a fourth dimension; white was black; truth was a liar. And yet I should have cut through all the topsy-turvydom and seized on the sane knowledge that Dave was Dave. Ah, well," she sighed, "I've paid for my sins. I've been down in the pit, and it was horrible. And he—his pride is a great and glorious part of him, and I wouldn't have it altered; but his love should have taught him tolerance and good sense. He'd have been sorry when he got away alone. And if he is still riding his pride, as you put it, I'll—I'll fight him inch by inch and tooth and nail! He shan't go away——"

"He's wantin' bad to get back to the crest of the wave again—that's his own way of puttin' it," said Jimmy.

"Ah, yes," she smiled, "he said he lived on the crest of the wave. He loves life so; he has so much of life in him——"

"He has a sense o' humour, too," said Jimmy, "and I'm hopin' he'll have got the half-nelson on it again by the time we get back."

Marion put her hand to her breast.

"My heart is beating quick—pit-a-pat; I can feel it. Do you think it'll be a hard fight, Jimmy? I'll go down on my knees to him."

"Don't do anything so silly. He'd not let you, anyway—well, here we are."

The taxi drew up at the hotel, and they stepped out. Marion hung on to Jimmy's arm as he paid the driver. "My knees are all wobbly," she whispered. And then as they went upstairs; "I wonder if he'll be terrible, as he was when he met me along the cliffs. Goodness! that was only two hours ago—it seems ages."

"Never mind how he is," said Jimmy, patting her hand. "You just go for him bald-headed, as you said you would; and I'll be at the bottom of the stairs ready to chase him back if he breaks away."

Marion laughed hysterically.

"It sounds as if we were going to try and tame a wild bull!"

"Mebbes it will be like that—you never know with Dave—and mebbes it'll be as easy as feeding candy to a baby."

At the door of the room Jimmy paused and listened.

"He's pacing up and down the deck—reckon we've got him groggy." And then with a sudden movement he flung open the door, and they stood upon the threshold, Marion slightly in front. David swung about in his stride. For one instant a look of staring amazement hardened his eyes, and then the next moment a glad smile broke across his face. He almost leaped at Marion, and gathered her in his arms, swinging her right off her feet. She clung to him with a little sobbing cry: "Oh-h! Dave—Dave!" He bent and kissed her hungrily; a long, long kiss—their first. Then he swung her into the crook of his arm, and thrust out a hand to Jimmy, who had begun to back sheepishly away.

"You old son of a sea cook, you!" said David, the light of laughter dancing in his eyes; "you knocked me off my pedestal. And you've been butting in again, you mahogany-faced busy-body! Get out—and say, Jimmy, when you hit the bar stand yourself a

segregated, elongated cocktail—a dozen of 'em, and tell them to chalk it down to me."

He affectionately knocked Jimmy's hat off, and then shut the door upon him. Jimmy, grinning, picked up his hat, and descended to the hall; but this time he astonished the clerk by sliding down the banister!

CHAPTER XVIII
A WILD-CAT SCHEME

MARION sat for a long while on the verandah of her bungalow that night after David had left her, dreaming of the sweet, ecstatic moments of their reconciliation, thinking of every word he had spoken to her, listening again to the tender, repentant, adoring tones of his voice, and seeing again the love-light and the joy of life shine once again in his eyes. Presently she rose from her chair and began to roam about indoors, thrilling to the great happiness that flooded in upon her soul, and talking about it to her dog, who padded at her heels. In her bedroom she posed before her reflection in the wardrobe mirror, and laughed at her flushed cheeks and glowing eyes. "Oh dear," she said aloud, "I'm so happy I don't think I'll ever sleep to-night." Suddenly a desire to see her mother came over her; she wanted to tell her the good news, "and also," she cried to Caesar, "to enlighten dad about his precious friend Margesson. So come along; we'll go and see what they've got to eat at home!"

She startled her parents by walking in upon them just as they were preparing to retire. It had been a rather gloomy evening for them. Mrs. Fay had felt worried every time she thought of Marion and her white, forlorn face as she had last seen it; and it was also with very real distress that she had pondered on the riddle of David and his amazing conduct.

The shipbuilder himself had spent some uneasy hours. The lies he had told still lay heavily on his conscience, and more than once grave doubts about that conversa-

tion on the telephone had assailed his mind. When he and Marion had appeared in the cabin, David's bewilderment had seemed altogether real; his stern demand that they should listen to his explanation sincere. Honestly, Mr. Fay told himself, the young man then neither looked nor acted like one discovered in compromising circumstances. Moreover, the fire and the garbled account of it in the *Observer* had struck him as suspicious: it seemed too utterly opportune. Just in all his dealings, it troubled him now to think that he had never once tried to give David the benefit of the doubt. All the evening he had thus wrestled with his conscience, and was on no happier terms with it at the end.

When Marion radiantly burst in upon them her advent was like a tonic wind in a depressing atmosphere.

"Hello, old things!" she cried. "I wondered whether I'd find you up. Is there anything to eat, mother? I'm doing a raid on the kitchen—the girls will have gone to bed, I suppose. Just sit down and make yourselves comfortable. I shan't be a minute."

She rushed off, leaving them perplexed but much relieved at her smiling cheeriness. Mrs. Fay sat down feeling rather excited. Presently Marion returned carrying a tray laden with things to eat.

"I couldn't be bothered to get anything ready down at the hut, and I'm simply starving," she said, helping herself to the leg of a chicken. She took a mouthful, and then turned to her father; "and dad,"—in her excitement she picked up the chicken leg and emphasised her remark by shaking it at him; "if you ever mention your precious Mr. Margesson to me again, or ask me to stay dinner with him, or invite him to any parties or—or functions whatsoever, I leave this house pronto and for good. 'Pronto' means 'at once,' and Jimmy Drake uses it very effectively. So that's that!" She set the chicken leg upon her plate. "The

damnable, intriguing anachronism that he is—Margesson, I mean. He should have lived three hundred years ago—he'd have made a perfectly splendid chief poisoner to Catherine de Medici." She turned to her mother; "He's at the bottom of it all, mumsie. Dave came to see me, found me along the cliffs. I was—er—er, uppish. So he just got astride what Jimmy Drake calls his—David's—lily-white pride, told me the truth, scorned me, withered me up, and then left me. He said 'Good-bye.' I lost hold of things after that for a little; then wandered back and had a talk with Johno. Presently Jimmy Drake put in an appearance and sorted things out, as he put it, and carried me off to town to David. And now I'm so happy I could dance and sing, and I'm sure I'll never sleep to-night. Wait until I've put a few gaps in my appetite, and then I'll tell a connected story."

During her recital Mr. Fay fidgeted in his chair, lit a cigar and let it go out, passed the palm of his hand several times over his head in a smoothing action that didn't seem to smooth, crossed and uncrossed his legs, and generally displayed uneasiness and a troubled mind. When Marion had finished her story he got up and began to walk rather agitatedly about the room.

"There seems no doubt about it," he muttered, more to himself than to them. "Grant's actions bear truth in them, and so do his friend's. We are bound to believe Mr. Drake. I must say that they both acted like self-righteous men. But, hang it all, it's beyond belief that Margesson can have stooped to such villainy——"

"It's nothing of the kind," cried Marion. "And I want to know this, dad: did you or did you not actually see David, with your own eyes, going into 'The Meldon' with that woman?"

He came and stood rather shame-facedly before her.

"No, my dear, I did not;—er—I've—I've a confession to make. I never saw David with that woman at all until we went aboard the schooner. It was Margesson who told me about his having been seen with her; but he made me promise not to divulge his name. I was only too ready to accept what he told me. It never occurred to me at first to doubt him. I regarded him as an honourable man; and I frankly admit I seized on the chance to put an end to this friendship of yours with the Australian—I wasn't enamoured of the match. I thought you could do better socially, Marion. I'm—I'm afraid I've made a sad mess of things."

Marion had risen to her feet, and was gazing at her father with unbelieving eyes.

"You mean you deliberately told a lie about it, dad?"

"Not deliberately, Marion. You and your mother pressed me for details, and as I'd promised Margesson to keep his name out of it I shouldered the burden of proof. I but said what I thought he'd have said. I lied vicariously——" he turned away, and began once more to walk about—"but I admit—I admit it was reprehensible, none the less. I'm profoundly sorry, dear."

"And so am I," said Marion, with fine scorn. "For had I known at the beginning that Margesson had dropped the poison I'd have been at once convinced that the whole thing was a lie. I knew only too well that he hates David, and had tried before to do him an injury. . . . oh! Dad, how could you! This has hurt me almost as much as the other did. And what's your objection to Dave? His people are folk of some standing and power in Australia, and they are very rich. Dave himself is surely a gentleman; not——" again scorn rang in her voice; "not your tailor-made, drawing-room sort, I grant; he hasn't quite the polish, for instance, that your fine friend

Margesson seems to have acquired so easily—and he a cobbler's son!—but his manners are infinitely better, because they are natural and spring from his fine, clean soul. I tell you this, dad; Dave's big, big in every way; bigger far than I, and I'm going to marry him! I forgive you, daddy, for you've always been such a good old thing, and I realise you did it for what you thought was best. But you'll never know how much you've hurt me."

"I'm very, very sorry," he said betwixt a gulp and a sigh, "and I'll make the amende honorable to Mr. Grant; and I'll try—I'm afraid I must be very blind and prejudiced—to see him with your and your mother's eyes."

"Well, you can do more than that, daddy." She went to him and pulled his head down and kissed him on the top of his bald pate; "and now I'll leave you to mother's tender mercies! Good night."

When she had gone the shipbuilder crossed over to where his wife sat regarding him with reproachful eyes.

"That damned Margesson!" he said, "I'll tell him what I think of him when he comes up to the yard to-morrow; and for two pins I'd tell him to take his bally ships and get 'em built somewhere else—er, my dear, I *have* made a mess, a horrible mess of things; but—but you're not thinking I've developed clay feet, are you?"

Mrs. Fay gave a gentle laugh.

"No, Billy, I'm not thinking that. I'm only sorry you didn't trust Marion's better judgment—and mine! But I'm too glad to have got back my faith in David to be angry with you, dear."

* * * * *

Margesson, as David had foretold, was indeed a sick man after he had been disconnected from the soup tureen by his agitated butler; and it would have

taken more than the two days for his recovery that David had prescribed had he been a man of ordinary toughness of fibre. But his years of sailor life had endowed him with a hardy physique, so that on the third day he was able to issue serenely forth from his house, sore in every joint, certainly, and stiff in more muscles than he had thought it possible for the human body to possess ; but nevertheless outwardly master of himself and in his normal state of mind ; which is to say that he was as self-satisfied as usual, and pleased with the march of events. The very fact of that electric irruption of David was proof that his plans had succeeded, and the way laid open for the untrammelled prosecution of his suit for Marion's hand. It was, therefore, a rude shock to him when Mr. Fay walked into his office that morning, and with unpromising candour and no preamble whatever said :

"Margesson, you've played me a very dirty trick. You're a scoundrel and a skunk, and, I'm thinking, several different kinds of a fool. Your whole theatrical plot is blown to smithereens, and a more dastardly, mean, and cowardly scheme for an innocent man's undoing I never heard of. You'll see my daughter no more, sir ; and socially I'm done with you. If it wasn't such bad business, and if the agreements were not binding, I'd tell you to go and get your ships built anywhere but at my yard, and be damned to you. At all events, after this we meet only on a business footing. Good morning."

And stalking indignantly out of the office, the shipbuilder slammed the door upon Margesson, and left him sitting speechless at his desk.

* * * * *

For a long time he sat thus, his usually alert mind numb under the sudden shock of learning that the game was up, and that all his striving, his scheming, his rascality, had gone for nought. Marion henceforth

would have nothing but scorn and contempt for him. He could no longer sun himself in the hope of winning her, nor realise again the joy of courtship—that had all come suddenly to an end, dissipated like a whiff of chimney smoke, ere it had got properly begun. For the moment he could only think of her, see her in a dozen different visions, dwell upon her loveliness, the sweet fragrance of her charm, the alluring wonder of her slim, white body, and rage impotently at his defeat. His thoughts were not tender, not pure. Desire flooded his soul, now that desire seemed definitely to be beyond any hope of gratification. He fell presently to thinking of the might-have-beens, of kisses he would never have, embraces that another would take; of halcyon honeymoon days and passionate nights of bliss—to be realised only in longing dreams. After a while this phase passed, his thoughts climbed out of the slough, and began to busy themselves upon the other and finer things which had gone down in the shipwreck of his hopes. He would never have the pride of possession, never know the delight of installing Marion as the mistress of his great house, or of seeing her queen it at his table or charm the guests whom he would have chosen with such infinite care. Gone, too, were the hopes he had nursed of realising with her aid his snobbish dreams of social conquest. Next he fell to thinking of what she would have meant to him as a companion; of the love and sympathy she would have lavished on him; of her bright, blithe spirit, her deep culture, her gloriously healthy and sane attitude to life, of all that she was which he was not—thought of these things until his soul was sick within him.

The telephone bell upon his desk rang insistently. He savagely took off the receiver and flung it down. An anxious-looking clerk, after a timid knock, popped his head into the room. "Get to the devil out of this!" growled Margesson, getting up to lock the door upon

his scared and scurrying employee. This break in his musings had clarified his brain a little. He strode to the window, hands deep in pockets, and looked out.

"I said I'd go through hell to win her; and I'm not even to have the opportunity," he muttered; "did ever a man have such rough luck, be bowled out ere he had got the bat fairly into his hands?" He whirled about to his desk, and fingered the letters and papers upon it, looking at them with half-seeing eyes. Business, the control of affairs, the piling up of wealth, the greedy grasping of power—it had been the breath of his nostrils. What good was it all now? A council meeting was to be held that evening; the agenda lay before him. Pah! how could he go through with it, how sit at the head of that company of stodgy tradesmen and lawyers, with its sprinkling of querulous, fault-finding labour men, and listen to their droning speeches and discussion of dry-as-dust civic matters, when his thoughts would be elsewhere, his enthusiasm dried up, his mind centred on one thing only to the exclusion of all else?

With a sudden, decisive movement he bunched the papers together, strode to the door and unlocked it, returned to his desk and rang for his confidential clerk.

"Here, Wilson, take these and deal with them. What you can't tackle leave over until I return. I'm going away for a few days. I'll be back in time to sign the cheques on Friday. Get in touch with the Town Clerk, and tell him I'll not be able to preside at the meeting to-night, as I've been hastily called away on business. And for the rest just carry on in the usual way." He went home, changed into motoring clothes, and assuring himself that he plenty of money about him, set off in the car without any definite direction in his mind. All he wanted was to get away from the every-day scenes of his life, and in strange places to drink the bitter cup of defeat, free from the

restraints and influences that the routine of business and civic duties imposed upon him.

Unconsciously he drove west, through colliery districts at first, but very quickly reaching the hillier and more lonely country beyond. On the stark moorland roads with their lack of traffic he was able to indulge in bursts of furious driving, and bend his mind unhampered on the disaster that had come upon his plans ; and in the great distances and brooding silence he found a fit accompaniment to the dark and melancholy thoughts that crowded in his brain.

He skirted the Lake District and came to Carlisle, from whence he crossed the border by Gretna Green and for two days drove deep into the Highlands of Scotland, returning on the third day by Stirling and Selkirk into the wild region of North Northumberland, amidst the rolling Cheviot Hills and the bare windswept moorlands stretching away on either side of the hedgeless road. As he drove slowly through the sparsely peopled country he thought of the lusty times of old, of the days when the fierce border raiders must have traversed the very road on which he was now travelling, and when a strong-willed man must have been very much a law unto himself. Had he lived then, he thought, he would not have been so easily baulked of the thing he had set his heart upon. He gazed about at the gaunt, bare landscape, at the billowing hills and the great expanse of brown heath, with never a tree, nor house, nor sign of living thing—not even a sheep. A lone curlew wheeling above him, uttering at intervals its wistful piping, was the only mark of life within the focus of his eyes. And yet, he brooded, over the next rise, perhaps, lay a farm, a hamlet, a connecting link with law and order and the all-pervading power of civilisation. A man, strong-willed as he might be, could not even here be a law unto himself ; could never vanish, taking with him the thing he coveted, had stolen, and hope to remain

beyond the outstretching arm of the police ; even here, where civilisation seemed remote, and much of the surrounding country was perhaps never trodden on in generations, one was yet really but a stone's throw from the telegraph and the telephone—for the wires stretched by the roadside from the far distance ahead to the far distance behind, bridging the gulf of space. But, he thought, there was still many a place in the world where civilisation had not laid its encompassing arm ; where even to-day a man could indeed be a law unto himself. And from the near landscape his mind's eye leapt across ten thousand miles of space : he saw the illimitable waters of the Pacific Ocean, and desert isles set like jewels in the azure sea. A small, fast yacht, skilful navigation, secrecy, a careful covering up of his tracks, avoidance of trade-routes, and luck, would take him—and one other—to that paradise of strong-willed men ! Engrossed in this imagining and the wild possibility it held forth, he allowed the car to come to a standstill, and for a long five minutes gave himself up to the surging thoughts and desires engendered by this sudden hope of success. Presently he stirred, sat up at the wheel, passed his hand across the eyes, and hastily fished out his cigarette case and lit a cigarette. He started the car, muttering as he did so : “ A wild idea, a wild-cat scheme ; but—not so impossible, even in this year 1921. A wild idea, but seductive. I must not think about it too much—or too hastily ! But still I must think about it—now and then ! ” He smiled his slow, thin smile, accelerated the car, and drove forward towards civilisation and Bede. His apparently aimless journeying had not been so fruitless after all !

CHAPTER XIX
PINNACLES OF HATE

DAVID, with the "half-nelson" on his sense of humour again, and back once more on the crest of the wave, was disposed to laugh at Margesson; but he owed it to his conscience and to his sense of the fitness of things to try and bring the Mayor to book for the wanton destruction of the "Phantom." He and Jimmy accordingly paid a visit to the office of the *Observer*, and asked for an interview with the reporter who had sent in the news. The young man was at first inclined to be defiant, whereupon David said to him sternly:

"That report was a heap of clotted half-truths, and we can prove it. If you've the brains of a rabbit you'll tell us what we want to know; otherwise, when your bosses are sued with a writ for libel, you'll catch a cold draught."

At this the reporter changed his tone at once, and became apologetic and eager to placate them.

"What is it you want to know, sir?" he asked.

"We believe you were primed with that story, and we want to know who primed you."

"A man who helped me on to the dock-side; a man with horn-rimmed spectacles and dark moustache, who spoke in a thick voice and with a guttural accent. He wore a cap and a fawn-coloured overcoat. That's all I know, Mr. Grant. It was dark and I couldn't very clearly distinguish him."

David and Jimmy looked blankly at each other.

"Who in thunder could that be, Dave?" asked Jimmy.

David laughed.

"Lord only knows. Guess our friend has been too smart for us again. We are up a blind alley."

Outside in the street Jimmy pushed his hat back upon his head, and gazed disgustedly at David.

"And to think he's going to get away with it after all. It does fair rile me. Can't we do something more, Dave?"

"It's no use having suspicions, Jimmy. Say we went to the police; we've not an atom of proof to back up our story. Here's all we've got to go upon: the ship was fired fore and aft, and we suspect (we know in our minds) that Margesson either engaged someone to do it, or actually did it himself. We cannot even prove that the fire wasn't accidentally started. The inference is that it wasn't; but inferences are no use. We could put the police on the track of this woman they call the 'Lombard Lily'; but we know that she had nothing at all to do with the fire; and she'd simply say that in getting aboard she was but plying her trade—we'd get more mud than enlightenment from that quarter. So we've just got to forget about it, Jimmy, and be satisfied to know that Margesson had a beating and was blown up with his own mine. All he succeeded in doing was to drive Marion into my arms instead of separating us; and he's got you to thank for that, James. So be content, as I am."

"Well, I suppose what you say goes, Dave. But it's pretty gallin'. What do you reckon the underwriters will do? Don't you think they'll want to sift things a bit?"

"She was under-insured, if anything; and they know it."

Jimmy sighed, and settled his hat back on his head.

"Then there's nothin' else to do but go and have a drink. I'm not vindictive, Dave, as you well know; but when I think that I've never laid a finger on that leather-faced hoodlum yet, it just about gives me

yeller jaundice. And he'll be havin' high notions about himself these days, won't he ? " Jimmy suddenly brightened. " Well, mebbes he'll start something else. You've got to take him seriously now, Dave ; you said it yourself. He'll hate you more than ever."

" Oh, let him get on with it. I've no time for him now. The hours are short enough without wasting any of them on him. I reckon we can take care of ourselves ; and he can't rob me of Marion."

And with this Jimmy had for the moment to be content.

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Mr. Fay, however, was not at all inclined to let the matter rest. He felt, for one thing, that to have a man like Margesson as chief citizen of the town was a lowering of its civic dignity ; and for another he wanted very much to do something towards wresting retribution for the wanton destruction of David's schooner, as much in the interests of mere justice as because it would be a sop to his conscience for his having unwittingly maligned the Australian. He was also still sore at the way in which Margesson had abused the trust he had placed in him. Therefore, with quiet deliberation, he set on foot a campaign which had for object the enlightenment of the more influential people of the town as to the real character of the Mayor. Mr. Fay belonged to the Gentlemen's Club, and had the ear of practically all its most important members. His circle of acquaintances in the town itself was large. To everyone whom he could get to listen he told the tale of Margesson's perfidy. He was continually being warned that he was laying himself open to an action for libel by imputing the crime of arson on the Mayor ; but this he pooh-poohed.

" Libel ? Let him start an action. We may not have proofs, but we can wash enough of his dirty

linen in the courts to establish him for the rank outsider he has proved himself to be. Libel ? He daren't bring it ! ”

Which was no more than the truth ; for though the campaign of traduction began quickly to bear fruit, Margesson made no move. The more intimate of his associates and fellow councillors dropped into the habit of asking him awkward questions, as : When was he going to rebut the accusations that were being bandied about ? Was there any truth in the statements ? Did he not intend to take action ? And when they received harsh and abrupt answers, imperious requests to mind their own business, curt denials—and still no action, they began to look at him askance. They said among themselves that the Mayor could not afford to let the accusations go on without denouncing them ; that his position made him in duty bound to nail the lies to the counter. But when, as time passed, no denunciations were forthcoming, they naturally said there must be some truth in the statements. Margesson's enemies—and they were many ; men who were jealous of his sudden rise to fortune ; men who knew something of his inner history and the record of his war-profiteering—were quite convinced from the beginning that Mr. Fay would never risk such statements without something to back them up, and so quite easily and comfortably believed in them. And thus innuendo, sarcasm, jest, flew about, continually impinging on the hearing of the Mayor. He, with magnificent disdain, ignored them, and went about his business with serene indifference. The climax came when, one council day, a member—an acrimonious, fretful and malicious little pepper-and-salt lawyer—got up and made a speech in which he referred to the serious allegations that were being made against their worthy Mayor, and was it not time he at least publicly denied them, if he did not think them worthy of the trouble of a libel action ? He (the lawyer) submitted

that, having regard to the dignity of the position which Mr. Margesson held, and the confidence they and, indeed, the whole township placed in him by virtue of the historic office he held, it was the least the Mayor could do to get up in that place and reassure them as to his innocence, and publicly challenge his accusers to bring forth their proofs.

Margesson rose slowly to his feet, and stood for a moment looking around on the eager, craning faces of the councillors. His lean, sallow visage wore a scowl ; his brows were knitted in a menacing frown, his green eyes gleamed balefully. He made a gesture of disgust, and said :

“ We are members of a public body, elected and met here to order and discuss the affairs of the town ; not—— ” he shot out a finger at the little lawyer—— “ not to parade and publish our private animosities and domestic differences, nor to ventilate the secrets of our souls. These accusations, this traduction of me, strike at the root of my most sacred feelings ; they cannot be discussed without revealing matters which are not for the common ear ; matters that are purely private and which centre about the beautiful emotions of the human heart.” He drew himself up, and with an imperious, encompassing, disdainful wave of the arm, finished : “ And for the rest, you may all go to the devil ! ”

With firm and decisive tread he marched out of the Chamber, leaving the councillors aghast and agape.

It was the first sign of his loss of grip, both upon himself and his affairs. He was utterly indifferent to the stories that were going about concerning him. He knew from whence they emanated, and was serenely secure in the knowledge that nothing could be known to implicate him criminally. But his soul was weary ; life had lost its savour. His heart was sick for love, his body on the rack ; one thought, one bitter realisation, was with him asleep or awake : that which in all

his covetous life he had most coveted was denied him, and his material success become ashes in his mouth. And although he hugged to himself that monstrous idea which had been born of the journey across the moors, although he believed it possible of achievement, yet the belief was no real balm to his hurts. The fact of defeat, of not winning, was the bitterest pill he had to swallow. In hours and days of brooding he tortured himself with the knowledge that in the bid for Marion's love he had lost, and that even were he to take her by main force and succeed in holding her, the act would not bring him the triumph he had planned, nor abate the mortification he felt at the success of David. Always it came back to that—the cursed Australian! He was the evil genius of his life, seemingly fated to appear and wrest the chalice of love from his lips in the very act of drinking. His scheming had never produced anything but those terrible beatings, never given him the indubitable victory. Nay, in this last phase, the result had been the very opposite of what he had played for.

The incident of the council chamber seemed to start him on his downward progress from the pinnacle of achievement on which he then stood. Business became a thing that interrupted the morbid march of his thoughts, and pent up the emotions of hatred to which all the forces of his being were now impelling him to give free rein. He neglected it, and spent hours sitting in his chair, brooding, inert, a figure of grave concern to his staff, and a pitiful shadow of the once keen and alert man of affairs. Grant was no longer the sole object of his hatred. The relentless campaign of the shipbuilder had at last stung Margesson to irritation, which became day by day more acute, until, one afternoon at the end of a business interview, he had changed the cold, precise tone of the discussions by saying:

“Don't you think you've gone far enough, Fay, in

this senseless campaign of slander? There's a limit to what I can stand."

Mr. Fay looked up, with knitted brows.

"No, I don't, since it's my object to drive you to that limit."

Margesson laughed.

"I'm getting near it, and when I reach it, my mode of action will not perhaps be what you expect. I merely advise you to be careful, while there is yet time."

There were moments of mental clarity in which Margesson had a conception of the direction in which he was heading, and of the ruin he was bringing upon the fine edifice of his success. Memories of his early struggles, his life at sea, his careful and painstaking efforts in the building of his business, the mental sweat and moral obliquity it had cost him, would come crowding in his mind, and he would shudder at the thought that it was all going down to wreck. At these times he would make a vow to pull himself together, and stop the rot. But always he ended by thinking of Marion, and the vision of her and what he had lost curdled the currents of his thought, and drove him once more to his brooding.

Periodically there surged and mounted in him all the physical forces of his passion for the girl, and he groaned under the burden and press of his desires; and an irresistible impulse to see her, to watch her, and gloat over her beauty of form and face would come upon him. To these impulses he succumbed. He devised means of stealthily spying upon her. As the golden days of that summer sped on he used of an evening to walk by the cliffs, or saunter along the shore, and from some near-by vantage point watch her come down to swim. Sometimes he would rest in a sheltered spot on the cliffs, or sit in a cave, and with a pair of powerful binoculars follow her every movement. Often she came with David, who had rented a bungalow

near hers. The sight of them as they took the water together, laughing and talking gaily, and deeply and obviously absorbed in each other, sent the red blood of jealousy mounting within him. Madness would then come upon him, and he would grind his teeth and mutter curses on the Australian. But he never lowered his glasses, never took them off the vision of the girl. He had only eyes for her; and the clear picture of her dryad's figure, in her brilliantly scarlet costume and cap, as it showed within the lenses, burnt itself ever more deeply on his brain. Sometimes he walked boldly down the ravine past her bungalow, and occasionally saw her sitting on the verandah, usually in the company of David. He would stare fixedly at her, raise his hat with a solemn flourish, and pass on. He even went so far as to drive frequently in his car to the neighbourhood of her school, and with the machine drawn up at the curb of the street along which she was bound to pass, wait until she came in sight. He would go through the formality of raising his hat as she walked by, and sit with his eyes glued on her retreating form until she passed from view. He never followed her. In time he grew more bold, or, really, more desperate, in his visits to the bathing-place, and occasionally stood quite close and in the open, or lay reclining on the beach in the very track from the ravine. In a word, he haunted her.

She could not but see the method in it all, and it filled her with a sense of disquietude, and a feeling of intense annoyance. But as she said to David one evening when they were sitting on the verandah of the bungalow: "What can we do? He never molests me, never speaks. And yet there he is, half a dozen times in the day and every day. It's positively creepy. His green eyes glare as if they would devour me."

David only laughed.

"There's no need to get the wind up, my dear,"

was his cheerful comment, "not until he comes serenading under your window. We'll know then he's gone completely loco, as they say in America. I could give him another rough house, but that's becoming monotonous, and besides, it doesn't seem to have any effect."

"You aren't taking him seriously," Marion reproved; "and if any one ought you should."

"Too true," said David, smiling at her; "but I'm not capable these days of taking anything or anybody seriously. And for that, my dear, you have only yourself to blame."

Marion pouted.

"Well, then, haven't you any sympathy? It's me he haunts. Oh, Dave!" she shuddered, and her eyes grew wide as she laid a hand on his knee; "he's getting on my nerves!"

David, who had been lounging comfortably in a chair with his feet on the verandah rail, swung his legs down and sat up suddenly. His carelessness vanished. He gave her a look in which she read all the sympathy a woman the most avid for it could have wanted, and then said:

"Getting on your nerves, is he? Then we must be up and doing. I'm not going to have you made miserable. I'd no idea you were so upset about it. If—if you'd only marry me now—this week, I could take you away——"

"You know I promised dad not to have the wedding until next spring," said Marion; "otherwise I'd say 'yes' like a shot, Dave."

"Then there's nothing to be done but snuff him out."

Marion stared, and gasped.

"You—do you mean to kill him?"

David laughed.

"Good lord, girl, no! Do I look so savage as that? Here's the idea: he makes a tragedy of himself;

we'll make a comedy of him. You leave it to me, Marion; and just forget about him; drop him out of your consciousness."

"If you can stop him haunting me, that'll be easy, Dave. But how will you do it?"

"Laugh at him; make other people laugh at him; make him conspicuous; hit him through his overweening conceit. Then perhaps he'll realise he's played his hand and lost."

* * * * *

Next day Margesson had just taken up his accustomed position in the road along which Marion was presently to pass when David came on the scene, accompanied by a policeman. They stopped at the car, and David said, turning to his companion, "Here he is, constable. He doesn't look like a burglar, I admit; more like an advertisement for somebody's liver pills. But he's certainly a suspicious character, as I told you. I rather fancy he has designs on that big house over there. He has been coming here for some time now. I've watched him. There's probably a gang of them at work. One of his pals——"

The constable, who at sight of Margesson had saluted respectfully, interrupted David with an abrupt: "What are you talking about? Do you know who this is?"

"I haven't the foggiest idea, constable. But he's quite a desperate cove, I imagine. See how he glares! I'll bet he has a gun in his hip pocket."

"You can bet nothing of the kind, young feller," said the constable with emphasis. "This gentleman is the Mayor of Bede."

"Is he? Good lord!" exclaimed David with well-simulated surprise. "Now who'd have thought that? Queer! Of course," he went on, with a cheerful smile, "that may be only a blind. These gangs are nearly always bossed by some master-mind, who frequently

moves in the best society. I've seen in New York, for instance——"

"Put a sock in it, my man," said the constable. "There's nothing of that about this gentleman." He finished oracularly: "He's one of our most respected townsmen!"

"Exactly," murmured David with twinkling eyes, "they often are. Well, I see I'll have to report this to your superior. His being the Mayor sort of lifts it above your head. I'm certain he's up to no good, though. A man wouldn't come here every day, practically at the same hour, and stop in the same place just to give his car a rest. If he isn't a burglar, he's got some other object in view. Maybe he is planning a murder. He has rather a wild look——"

At this moment Margesson, with a furious movement, started the car and drove off in a quick burst of speed. David laughed as he turned to the surprised constable, and slipped a couple of half-crowns into his hand.

"That's done it. I know quite well he isn't a burglar. He comes here—and elsewhere—to annoy a young lady friend of mine; the daughter of a gentleman who is, like the Mayor, a most respected citizen of the town—Mr. Fay, the shipbuilder. You know him? That chap is too cute to speak to the girl or molest her. He just makes himself a nuisance by constantly hanging round where she is. And I'm busy curing him of his ubiquity. We'll keep this to ourselves, you and I. The lady doesn't want any bother. But I'll be glad if you'll walk along this street at about the present hour for the next few days, just to see whether our friend has learnt his lesson. I've an idea, though, that he'll not come back . . . ah! here's the young lady. Afternoon, Marion. This gentleman and I have just fixed our friend Margesson. . . . you understand the position now, constable?"

The constable scratched behind his ear.

"I reckon so, sir, but I'm amazed at the Mayor.

Queer game for a fellow like him to be playing. He hadn't a word to say for himself, so I suppose what you say is right. I'll do as you ask, sir, and keep an eye on this road. Of course you'll understand that if he does come again I'll not dare say anything to him—his position makes him a sort of superior officer."

"Oh, quite, constable. In fact, I don't want you to interfere. Just let me know if he comes again. I'll look you up in a day or two. Good-bye."

And taking Marion's arm, David led her off chuckling.

"That's one up to us," he said gleefully, and he began to tell her what had happened. "And by thunder," he finished, "you should have seen his face! This is better than giving him a rough house; and it wipes off some of the score. He'll not trouble you here again."

* * * * *

Margesson had gone home in a venomous frame of mind. As David had predicted, to be laughed at, to be publicly made a butt of, was the one thing to touch his inordinate vanity to the quick; and to have his goings and comings so familiarly and insolently discussed with a policeman, to be made conspicuous, and have attention drawn to him by that fiendish and deliberate misinterpretation of his movements, in a word, to be so cleverly and diabolically scored against, drove him to fury. He raised his clenched fists on high.

"The swine said I was out for murder! My God, how little he knew what truth he was speaking. Rather than he should have the girl, rather than he should finish top-dog and lord it over me, I'd shoot his damned soul to hell and risk the consequences . . . but, if I've still my wits about me, there'll be no consequences!"

He sat down at his desk, and with hands deep in his

pockets, chin sunk on his breast, gave himself up to that terrible brooding which was sapping at his brain. Presently he stirred, opened a drawer, and took out a torn and tattered piece of parchment—his Tree of Achievement. Gloomily he laid it before him, and fixed his sombre green eyes upon its garish colouring, studying it, and recalling with bitterness of heart the triumph he had felt as each successive limb had received the sap of life. Then with a hollow laugh he took it up and slowly tore it into fragments.

“Some achievement!” he muttered as he flung the pieces into the waste-paper basket, “to end in this!”

Could David have seen him then, and read the black thoughts seething in his mind, he would perhaps have been less inclined to chuckle at the success of his method of dealing with Margesson’s pursuit of Marion, and impelled to measure more thoughtfully the man’s power and purpose for further evil. For Margesson had reached a state bordering on madness. That threat of murder, wrung from his inmost soul, was something more than the expression of his immediate anger at David’s insolent ridiculing of him. It marked the pinnacle of his morbid, self-centred belief that there was not room in the world for the two of them; that throughout the years this smiling devil would haunt and mock him, cross his path at intervals and deride and defeat him. And he had decided, deliberately, that he would not allow such a thing to be. Whether he got Marion or not, he would prove to Grant that after all his was the stronger will, his the greater character, in this wrestle and clash of souls. In defeat he would rise above his enemy; he alone would have the moral courage to take absolute vengeance into his own hands, and mete out retribution. With the soul-destroying egotism that had always warped and twisted his judgment, he declared to himself that only a great mind could conceive

and carry out murder as a means of demonstrating superiority of character ; and he did not realise that it was the thesis of a monomaniac. What matter if he were carried down to ruin in the execution of it ? He would still have the satisfaction of knowing that he had triumphed over his enemy. But in the days that followed he often repeated to himself that other phrase he had used : “ If I’ve still my wits about me, there’ll be no consequences ! ”

As for the rest, he had come to the end of endeavour, of achievement for its own sake. Without Marion, as he had told himself a hundred times before, achievement had no meaning, no call, no lure. He could not have her and at the same time keep to the grooves along which the forces of his activity had heretofore directed themselves. There remained only that other outlet for his energies—the desert Pacific isle ! He hugged to himself the fond belief that alone with him, and having to depend utterly upon his ability to provide for her, Marion might, in time, grow to love him ! It was a belief which sustained him in the course he had now definitely decided to launch upon.

CHAPTER XX

MARGESSON CUTS LOOSE

AUGUST had come, and with it the school vacation. Marion and David had set off for a walking tour in Scotland, a holiday taken with the full approval of Mrs. Fay and with the secretly dubious consent of the shipbuilder, who, though fully reconciled to his future son-in-law, and convinced in his own heart of the wisdom of Marion's choice, had a feeling that in allowing the lovers to have their way and go off together he was breaking some commandment that wasn't in the decalogue. They, in all guilelessness of heart, saw in it only a glorious adventure, during which the joy and poetry of their courtship could be realised to the full, with only the sun and winds as witnesses of the sweet follies and *tendresse* of love's springtime. Margesson faded from their thoughts. There was so much else to think about, and wonder at, and look forward to. He and his fell activities were things written off from their consciousness by the multitudinous interests of their now closer comradeship.

But he had not forgotten them. During their absence, in pursuit of his wild-cat scheme, he engaged in several acts which set the town momentarily agog. The first was his resignation from the Mayoralty; the second his retirement from business. He arranged for the disposal of his concerns by private treaty; and as they were commercially sound, and his commitments well within the mark of sane finance, there was a good deal of competition for their purchase. Mr. Fay, as one directly interested by virtue of his contracts,

rang up Margesson as soon as he heard of the transaction.

"What's the idea?" he said. "I needn't remind you that we are heavily committed on those three boats. The steelwork is all ordered, as you know; and you also know we've started with the plating of the first one. We've got the berth for the second ready, and I'd arranged for the keel to be laid this week. What are you going to do about it?"

"No need to get panic-stricken, Fay," came the cold response. "Brewster and Westfall are the likely purchasers, and you know they are sound. The transfer will engage them to honour all liabilities and commitments. As for the idea, keep guessing."

"H'm," muttered the shipbuilder as he set down the telephone and sat back with knitted brows. "Looks as if he'd reached the limit, and this is the beginning of his action. I wonder what the end will be?"

The third act of Margesson was the buying of the bungalow owned by Johnny Cossar. Mr. Fay heard of this at the Club from Johnny himself. At the news the shipbuilder looked serious.

"What's his game, Johno?" he asked. "And what are you giving up the bungalow for? And how did you come to sell it to him?"

Johnny shrugged his shoulders, and answered the questions backwards:

"I advertised. He saw, came, and bought. Why am I giving it up? Well, what's the good of hanging around here now? Marion isn't for me. I'm selling more than my bungalow. I'm unloading my collection of theodolites on the market, and my pair of compasses. I, too, am going out of business. Do you know anybody that wants a good brass plate?"

"What are you going to do?"

"I think I'll take up the quest of the Holy Grail," answered Johnny in his jestingly serious way, "or," he added, "the Golden Girl. There's nothing else

to go in quest of; practically everything's been discovered."

"Going abroad?"

"Oh, quite! The losing lover always does that. Restlessness, you know, and tormenting sorrow, his bitter thoughts hounding him on."

"I'm sorry, Johnno. You know that. I'd sooner you married Marion than anyone."

"Well, Superbus had the aces; and so somebody gets the chance of a good brass plate cheap. Anyhow, I'll see a few countries and some new forms of poker I'd have otherwise missed. And Margesson also got it in the neck. So there you are; compensation everywhere, as Mr. Emerson said in 1834 or thereabouts."

"You take it easy, Johnno."

"Do I? It's Kismet, and what's the good of grousing?"

"It's a pity Margesson couldn't take it so sportingly."

"Sportingly?" queried Johnny, with a flicker of his eyelids. "You mistake. There's no sportsmanship in love. I'm so far from taking it sportingly that I'd perjure my immortal soul and give my brass plate away if I thought Marion would love me. But knowing she wouldn't—d'you think I'm one of those who cry for the moon?"

"Well, I can only say again I'm sorry, Johnno," said Mr. Fay, feelingly: "dashed sorry. But what d'you reckon Margesson's up to?"

"Nothing. He told me when he was negotiating for the bungalow that he was under Doctor's orders to work less and take more exercise and fresh air."

"But even so, there was no necessity for him to pull his anchors up altogether, as he has done. And he seems as fit as ever he did."

"There's a wild look in his eye. He's got nerves badly, I think."

"H'mph! Some time ago he threatened me with action in regard to what I've been saying about him; and perhaps you didn't know he's been sort of shadowing Marion—making himself a bally nuisance until Grant warned him off. And now he's thrown up all his affairs and bought a bungalow—unpleasantly near Marion's."

"And also, don't forget, comfortably near Grant's."

"Well, yes, there's something in that. But still, this change on the part of Margesson is too sudden, too drastic, not to mean danger to—who else but us; to David and Marion and me? There's purpose in it."

"You exaggerate his power for evil," said Johno. "We have pretty sound laws for the protection of the ordinary citizen. If he annoys Marion, give him in charge. He's a chap I never had any use for. Don't worry. Grant's quite capable of looking after Marion, and I cannot see how Margesson has an earthly chance of getting away with this haunting business."

"I dunno. He's a bad man to beat. David held him up to ridicule in front of a policeman for pestering Marion, and this buying of the bungalow is apparently his reply to that—just so as he can see her as frequently as possible without making himself too obnoxious. He has taken his loss of her rather badly—there's no mistaking that. I tell you there is more in all this than meets the eye. I'm convinced he's meditating some real mischief."

"He's more likely just fed up because he has found a world he couldn't conquer," laughed Johnny. "But if you are so perturbed, I'd let Grant know of your fears as soon as he returns. I'm nosing around a lot just now, and if I hear of anything I'll tell you. For old time's sake I'd like to help Marion. But I really think you are needlessly worrying yourself, in spite of the mischief Margesson has already done."

* * * * *

Johnny, literally for the moment at a loose end, in his "nosing around" happened one day upon another person in a similar state—Jimmy Drake. Jimmy was really supposed to be on the high seas heading for Melbourne and the "missus." He had bade good-bye to David when the lovers had gone holiday-making. David had commissioned him to look out for a new schooner, and have her ready for a honeymoon cruise in the Pacific in the following Spring. But Jimmy had decided not to depart just then. He still nourished a sneaking desire to give Margesson "the glad hand," as he put it, and was still obsessed with a belief that the ex-Mayor had "got away with it" far too easily; and that in the interests of justice and the time-honoured rights of all proper men "a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye, and two of 'em if they could be got," should be exacted. He therefore prolonged his stay in Bede from day to day, prowling about in the hope that some chance encounter would give him the opportunity he wanted. His acquaintance with the dock-land taverns, the more select bars and sitting rooms of the up-town hotels, the by-ways and alley-ways, and the day and night life of the seaport became, like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, extensive and peculiar. It was in the smoke-room of his own hotel, the "County," that he and Johnny Cossar met again. Jimmy's greeting was bluff and hearty, and he nearly wrung the quondam surveyor's hand off.

"By thunder, Mr. Cossar, I'm real glad to see you. I've been wandering around this burg for a fortnight like the fifth ace in a bum card-sharping joint, and it's lowering to the system. I know all the barmaids from here to Potter's Bank, and I've sampled most of the brands of whiskey that are distilled, and some that aren't! What's your swizzle? They keep a special brand of Scotch liqueur here that is the absolute

goods—mellow as a bishop and with a jolt like a pile-driver.”

“No,” murmured Johnny, with his comical smile; “Beer for me. Common, plebeian beer, in a tankard—the drink of poets and policemen.”

“Pint, I suppose?” queried Jimmy, grinning.

“Oh, quite!—are you staying on for the wedding?”

“Wedding? That isn’t ’til next Spring. No, I’m supposed to be somewhere about the Suez Canal now, headin’ for down under; but to tell you the truth, Mr. Cossar, if I don’t just get my hands on our friend Margesson once, I’ll never sleep contented with my conscience again. I’m not a fightin’ man. I ain’t vindictive, as I’ve said to Dave a dozen times; but I do believe in ‘giving the enemy blow for blow,’ as the hymn says. It ain’t my way to turn the other cheek; I prefer to lay the other feller’s open! Dave himself used to be rather like that, in a more affable sort o’ way, of course; he always fought like a gentleman, like a saint sometimes; he could afford to—being so strong and like greased lightnin’ when he gets going. But since he fell in love he’s turned that forgivin’ he’d let an insurance agent tweak him by the nose. So that’s why I’m still hangin’ around, hoping I’ll run across his nabs and pick a quarrel with him. I ain’t had any luck yet—never seen him except in his car.”

“Well, cheer up, Mr. Drake,” said Johnny: “if Marion’s father is right in his suspicions you may get an opportunity yet.”

“What’s the news?” asked Jimmy, all interest.

Johnny told him.

“I’ll bet the old man’s right,” said Jimmy, slapping his leg. “I told Dave he wasn’t done with the blighter, but Dave just wouldn’t be bothered. After this I’m not leaving until I’ve seen him again. And I’ll do a bit of detective work. Mr. Cossar,” he said solemnly, “it’s my belief Margesson intends to have

the girl yet by any means. He'll never acknowledge himself beaten, and he'll never give up tryin' to get what he wants. Dave knows that; knows it better than me. And yet there he is, in his large, easy way, just ignorin' the long-faced swab. I'm gladder than ever I met you, Mr. Cossar."

"Tell you what, Mr. Drake," said Johnny suddenly, "I'm thinking of going on the wanderpath. I'm at the end of the pavement, and want to forget. You seem to know your way about the world—I'd like to join up with you for a spell—accompany you to Australia when you go. I've always hankered to visit it. That is, if you care to be bothered with me."

"Put it there, sir. Nothing would suit me better."

"You're a married man?—got a home in Australia?"

"Too true!"

"Ah! I'd hoped, now that Mr. Grant is thinking of domestic ties, that you were at a loose end like myself, and didn't mind where you went. I thought perhaps we might have wandered around a bit. I've—er—not to be sentimental, I've rather taken a liking to you."

Jimmy grinned.

"Thanks. But you see I'm a sailorman, properly speakin', and Dave still wants me. Now he's a feller who'd have toted you about. Lord! he's been everywhere. He's had some adventures, has Dave. But still, you come with me down under, and I'll put you on the way to seein' things after that."

"Right," murmured Johnny; "and in the meantime I'll nose around with you here. Perhaps Margesson is up to something. You'll have a—er—a pile-driver with me?"

"Sure!" said Jimmy heartily.

* * * * *

Their "detective" work during the next week

resulted in the discovery of the following meagre facts: that Margesson had sold up his house, lived at the bungalow, and spent a portion of each evening sitting on the verandah with a book in his hand which he but fitfully read; and that he seemed to be taking a more than cursory interest in the fitting out of a trim little oil yacht which lay in the docks.

"It isn't much," said Jimmy rather disgustedly as they sat once again in the smoke-room of the hotel. "Reckon we'd lose out at the Sherlock Holmes game. But I'm keeping an eye on that yacht. She looks to me a real dinky craft, and I bet she can hike along when she's opened up. I see in this morning's paper Margesson's given it out that he is presently off for a long cruise in search of health—about the last thing a true-blue sailor would think of doing; and he's that if he's nothing else. And anyhow, if he was as sick as he pretends he is, he'd choose something more roomy and comfortable to go a-voyaging in. Whatever he wants that yacht for it ain't for the good of his health; I'll bet she's something wicked in a heavy sea."

"Perhaps he only intends to moon around the Mediterranean," said Johnny.

"You can bet your life he doesn't. He's fillin' her to the gunwale with stores; and it's mostly oil! I should say he doesn't intend to make his first port this side of the Equator. No, sir; I confess I don't see his game; but I'm keeping an eye on that yacht—I wish to goodness Dave was back!"

CHAPTER XXI
UNDER THE SHADOW

A WEEK later David and Marion returned, full of the adventures of their holiday, sun-burnt and healthy, and radiantly happy. It was early evening when they reached Marion's home, and they found Mrs. Fay waiting expectantly. Marion flung her arms about her mother's neck and hugged her.

"Oh, it has been lovely, mumsie. And we've done Burns' country, and Scott's country, and the Trossachs, and the Highlands. And one night we had to camp out on the moors, and Dave made a proper camp, and lit a fire, and caught some fish in a mountain stream, and showed me how to cook it without a pan, and we ate it with our fingers and he held me in his arms and told me stories of his adventures and I went to sleep like that; and when I woke he was still holding me in the same position and couldn't move his arms for cramp for a long time—and——" breathlessly, as she turned loving and admiring eyes on David: "he's a great man to go a-walking with!"

David came forward, laughing:

"And she's a great girl to go a-walking with. I've got to thank you for trusting her to me——"

"Oh, tut-tut, Dave," said Mrs. Fay. "I knew what I was doing . . . are you still as much in love with each other?"

"Are we?" said David, with a quizzical glance at Marion.

She pretended to consider, and then with a little joyous laugh said:

"Not 'arf, we ain't! And God bless Jimmy Drake!"

"And Margesson," said David.

"Ah!" broke in Mrs. Fay: "Margesson! There's news to tell you about *him*!"

"Oh, bother Margesson," said Marion with a pout of disgust. "I don't want to think of him; I'd forgotten all about him. Why did you mention his name, Dave?"

"Well, had it not been for him we should never have met."

"We should. It wasn't Margesson: it was Fate," protested Marion. "He was only the instrument—ah, that'll be dad," as the sound of a motor car drawing up outside was heard. "We can change the subject now." She ran into the hall. Mrs. Fay followed, whispering to David as she passed him:

"We cannot—but you'll hear when Billy comes in."

David waited within the room, and then from the medley of greetings his ear caught a surprised: "Hullo! Jimmy," from Marion.

"The old bucko!" murmured David, striding to the door: "What's he doing here still?"

He shook hands with Mr. Fay, and then turned to where Jimmy was standing grinning affectionately at him.

"You're looking fine, Dave," said Jimmy as they exchanged a hearty grip. "And—er—I'm still a long way from the missus!"

"You are, and it'll be your own funeral, Jimmy, when you do see her—not mine. Miss the boat?"

"I never tried to catch her."

"Why?"

"Because I've a sensitive conscience, Dave, as you well know; and Margesson lay heavily on it!"

"Oh, Margesson!" said David, throwing up his hands; "and Marion wants to forget all about him."

"And that's just what he won't let us do," chimed in Mr. Fay as he began to shepherd them all into the

room. "There have been happenings, Dave, and Jimmy called on me a day or two ago to find out when you were due to return. So I invited him to come along with me this evening to dine with us. Then we could all discuss the news and try and arrive at what it portends. But first let's have your adventures. I see Marion's bubbling over with eagerness to tell me."

Later, at dinner, David himself brought the conversation round to Margesson.

"What's this news about our friend the Mayor?"

Mr. Fay told what he knew, and Jimmy related how he and Johnny Cossar had come together and how they had found out about the yacht, and the way in which Margesson spent his time at the bungalow. He finished by saying:

"And these last few days, Dave, I've learned that he's shipping just about the toughest looking crew you'd lay your hands on in this port. There's a mate and a couple of engineers, a cook, and two deck hands. The mate and the chief engineer are hard-case down-and-outs, who'd have a job to remember the last respectable packet they sailed in. They're whiskey swillers, with faces you could hit with a crow-bar and never leave a mark. The second engineer is a pasty-faced swab with a squint that would turn milk sour. If he has a ticket I should say he pinched it off another gaol-bird. You could say similar kinds of things about the deck-hands, only you'd want more words! So there it is; and what I want to know is: what's Margesson doing with a bunch like that on a pleasure cruise?"

David was thoughtful for a few moments.

"It might mean nothing at all," he said at last; "but knowing what we do about him it certainly has a sinister look. The thing I like the least is his taking the bungalow. That seems to indicate he

still has the desire to see Marion. Of course, he is free to please himself where he puts in his time, but coming on top of the last little encounter we had it looks as though he hadn't learnt his lesson. I suppose he is fitting out this yacht for another little shangai-ing business, with me as the principal. Well, he sure is an amazing fellow! and law and order and police forces don't seem to worry him a bit." David's eyes began to twinkle. "I say, Jimmy, wouldn't it be a lark to serve him with some of his own sauce and do a shangai-ing job ourselves! You see the devil of it is we cannot otherwise get going against him and forestall him. He is the aggressor and as cunning as they make them; and even if we were panicky enough to take the police into our confidence and tell them what we suspect they'd laugh at us. They would simply say those things aren't done—even by ex-mayors! I confess I'm getting tired of the man. Thrashing him only seems to inflame his desire to get even; holding him up to ridicule evidently impels him to larger and more grandiose plans. Well, I've just got to sail in and sling him up to his own yard-arm, so to speak, since I'm still quite evidently the fly in his ointment——"

"But don't you think it's possible he's after Marion?" Jimmy broke in; at which Marion gave a startled cry.

"What?" said David with suddenly knitted brows: "you think he's on some kidnapping game?"

"Well, I put it to you, Dave. Do you think he's going to all that trouble of fitting out the yacht and saddling himself with that choice crew just to take *you* for a sea voyage? What would he do with you? Short of murdering you and slinging you overboard he would have nothing to gain except trouble. And I don't expect he's contemplating murder."

"It wouldn't surprise me in the least," was David's calm reply.

"Oh, Dave," cried Marion, in whose heart was an ever-deepening anxiety and foreboding; "how can you coolly sit there and say that? What Jimmy has said frightens me. I seem to see now what Margesson was like when he haunted me before we went away. I can see his eyes as they fastened upon me when he passed. There was something horrible in them; monstrous, possessive! I'm afraid now. I believe that Jimmy is right. Let us go to the police and convince them, insist upon their taking action against him. Aren't we in England, haven't we a right to seek the protection of the law? Why should we be forever pestered with this madman?"

Her evident agitation had a deep affect on David. For himself he cared but little; he felt, in the pride of his strength, no fear as to the machinations of Margesson so long as they were directed against him only; but the very suggestion that the ex-mayor had designs on Marion, that he was concocting some freakish scheme to take her by force—a scheme that none but a madman would ever contemplate—roused him to a cold fury of anger. And as he visioned what would be the outcome of that scheme were it successful, and what Marion would have to undergo whilst she was in his power, his easy, smiling air vanished, and his face grew bleak and hard.

"It may be," he said quietly, half to himself, and in a voice that had an edge on it: "maybe Jimmy's right. It seems unbelievable, even in Margesson. But so many of his other acts have seemed that. If he carried it out!——" he clenched his fist. "I see now that I daren't risk its not being true; I've got to prevent him even making a start with it."

"The police will see to that," said Mr. Fay sharply.

"What can they do?" replied David, still quietly. "They cannot arrest him. At best they could but

put a watch on him ; and if he's scheming for evil the evil will be done ere they could lay a finger on him. The fact simply is : we daren't even trust the police. It's a thing for us—for me—to see through alone. Don't you see it ? He cannot entirely succeed in his scheme ; it is bound to fail. But he may carry it partly through, whatever ultimate end he might plan ; and in carrying it partly through cannot you see what will happen to Marion ? ”

Mr. Fay was struck into anxious silence. Marion put out a nervous hand to David ; her mother had grown pale. This change in David's attitude affected them more because of his former cheerfulness.

“ Oh, it's intolerable ! ” burst out the shipbuilder. “ To think this is England, the twentieth century, and we've to sit mute and inactive under the shadow of a scheming villain like Margesson ! ”

“ We won't sit mute and inactive,” said David, smiling suddenly, once more his cheerful, debonair self. “ I'm afraid I frightened you all, but for the moment I was frightened myself at the thought of Marion in the clutches of the passion-mad fool. We mustn't get panicky. After all, this *is* England and the twentieth century. We'll get busy right now. For one thing, Marion must never go out after dark unescorted. I'll be able to see to that. She must not sleep at the bungalow again. Those are all the precautions we need take. Jimmy and I will see to the rest. Be easy, all of you——” he put out his arm and encircled Marion's shoulder, but turned his gaze specially to Mr. Fay : “ For Marion is dearer than life to me now, and do you think I'd let Margesson harm her ? I'll settle with him once and for all.”

His smiling air of confidence, the dynamic strength and vitality that radiated from him, gave them a sudden sense of security and comfort. Their fears struck them as a little absurd.

“ Come,” cried David, “ let us eat, drink and be

merry, for to-morrow we don't die ! On the contrary, to-morrow Jimmy and I will put our heads together, and if we cannot find a means to teach Margesson his place in the scheme of things, then we'll pawn our brains for rabbit food ! ”

CHAPTER XXII

INTO THE NET

BUT David and Jimmy did not get an opportunity to "lay their heads together." Margesson had already spun his web, and even then was sitting like a spider ready for his victims to walk into the net, and ready on the instant to dart out and pounce upon them. David, in first assuming that he himself was to be the sole object of Margesson's scheming, was wrong; Jimmy, in assuming that it was to be Marion, was also wrong. The scheme, diabolical in its cunning, provided for the undoing of both. A double purpose was to be achieved: revenge, and the possession of Marion.

David had stayed overnight at the shipbuilder's, and after breakfast next morning the lovers set off for the ravine to give the bungalows an airing, and, with the help of a maid who was to follow later, prepare them for re-habitation. It was one of those golden, sunny mornings of which that glorious summer had been so prodigal. The sea lay placid as a lake, blue to the far horizon, and lazily plashing on the yellow sands at the mouth of the cove. Marion paused as they came in at the head of the ravine, stood on tiptoe, and drew in a long, slow breath.

"Isn't it good to get the old familiar tang?" she cried, stretching out her arms. "Oh, I love the sea, Davy; and I'm painting pictures these days of the voyages you are going to take me."

He looked down on her eager face, its roses glowing duskily beneath the sunburn which their holiday and her life that summer in the open air had laid upon her

cheeks. His heart leaped in ecstasy as he thrilled to her April loveliness, to the fire and intelligence in her dark eyes, and to the frank admiration and love which transfigured her face each time she looked at him. There was no one about, and he caught her to him in a quick embrace that sent thrilling surges along their nerves.

"Yours can never come up to the reality, oh, Rose of my heart," he said. "I'll take you across seas compared with which the colour of that is like a dyed rag: seas blue with the fire of the tropics, and washing about lotus isles of fragrance and delight. Ours will be a honeymoon such as no one has ever had; I've got it planned——"

She kissed him with sudden passion, and then slipped from his embrace.

"If my honeymoon is better than my dreams," she whispered, "then it will be too happy for a mere mortal to bear. It cannot be better than my dreams!"

In silence more eloquent than words they passed on into the ravine. As the great expanse of sea opened out to their gaze Marion's eyes began to dance.

"It's not a bit of use," she said; "I must get into it, quick. Dave, we haven't been in the sea for a month! After we've opened out the huts we'll put on our togs and have one of our old-time swims." She threw out her arms: "I could swim the channel to-day!"

They descended to the bottom of the ravine and climbed out on the other side to where their bungalows were situated near each other, and in making their way thence they necessarily had their backs turned to Johnny Cossar's old place, and so were unable to see Margesson come out on his verandah, pause as he caught sight of them, and then retreat hastily within. Neither could they know that subsequently from behind a curtain he watched their every movement; and was thus prepared for instant action when presently they

appeared, in beach shoes, bathing costume and wraps, gaily making for the sands. Before ever they had reached the mouth of the ravine he had flung open a window, and leaning far out, began to wave a large white cloth up and down, gazing seaward as he did so.

Save for a couple of fishing smacks tacking leisurely to and fro about half a mile out, their brown, patched sails showing clearly in the sunshine, the wide expanse of sea was deserted. Shortly after Margesson had waved, one of the smacks lowered her sail, and then hoisted it again. Whereupon Margesson smiled, withdrew from the window, shut it, and presently came out and locked his door carefully behind him. That done, he set off up the ravine at a brisk pace. Having gained the roadway, he called at a near-by garage, and ordered a taxi to drive him as quickly as possible to a point near the docks. From thence he made his way to the yacht; and within ten minutes the vessel was working her way through the gates, headed for sea.

The beach at that hour was deserted when David and Marion cast off their wraps and took the water.

"We have it almost to ourselves," cried Marion. "Only those two fishing smacks yonder."

They splashed gaily through the shallows hand-in-hand, and then dived into a slowly swelling wave. Marion came up first, and on the instant was trudging with her swift, rhythmical strokes straight for the horizon, as was her custom. David followed in his less efficient way, and then presently sang out as Marion began to draw further ahead.

"Hi! old sport, not so fast! we're taking this walk together!"

Marion's head came up, streaming and gleaming in the sun.

"I must have a spurt, Davy. I'll slow up for you in a moment."

Her head went down, and once again her white arms flashed and dipped.

"She swims like a South Sea pearler," thought David, as he plunged manfully in her wake. "Reckon she'll have some fun out there, surf riding and what not."

When presently she allowed him to come up with her she shook her head and laughed in the sheer joy of life.

"Isn't it lovely! What d'you say to a mile out and a mile in? That will just about take the keen edge off me!"

He shook his head.

"I'm not a fish! Make it to those smacks, round 'em, and then back."

"Righto!"

The smacks were now riding on the swell with sails lowered. On their decks the fishermen were busied in overhauling nets and attending to lines thrown out from the side, and were all, apparently, oblivious to anything round about them but the job in hand. Yet one of their number, leaning behind the mast of the nearer smack, had a telescope directed on the bobbing heads of the swimmers.

"It's them," he said to another man near. "An' they're headed straight oot tae sea. That feller said they always went for a lang swim. Reckon we'll juist lie here and see if they come oot sae far as this. It'll be simpler that way."

When Marion and David drew near, the smacks had hoisted sails and were riding bow to stern parallel with the shore. The man with the telescope went to the seaward rail and leaned over. The swimmers came round astern of the vessels, sweeping in a circle of some twenty yards radius. As they swam side by side abreast of the first smack there was a sudden bustle aboard, and then a small boat, which had been moored to seaward, shot out, rowed by a couple of bearded men in caps and mufflers. They appeared to be cutting ahead of David and Marion, but when the

boat had come into line with them one of the men called out "Now!" ; the boat swung round, and was driven straight for the swimmers, directed so as to divide them.

"Hi! you swabs," shouted David, "where in thunder are you coming to?—" and then with a sudden note of warning and anxiety in his voice he cried: "Dive, Marion! Quick!" But it was too late. The boat came driving in between them. The men let go their oars, and one stood up and aimed a swinging blow at David with a long, heavy club. It landed on his unprotected head, and darkness and oblivion descended on him with the abruptness of death. Instantly the man dropped his club, leaned over, and grasped David by the hair, and held him alongside. The other man, acting with the same promptitude, had seized Marion by the back of the neck, swung her up, and then, as she was about to scream, clapped a hand over her mouth and gripped upon her cheeks with his fingers and thumb. Holding her thus, he braced his knees against the gunwale of the boat, leaned over and slipped his arm deep into the water beneath her, and unceremoniously lugged her aboard. She fell heavily across the thwarts face downwards, but was protected from injury or bruise by the arms of the man. At once she began to struggle and kick; but her captor was strong and proceeded to handle her firmly. He held her with his knees against the thwarts whilst he slipped a gag into her mouth, and then, with broad, thick bands of some silken material, bound her ankles and wrists. His instructions had quite evidently been to hurt or mark her as little as possible. The man now sang out "Heave!" and they were at once hauled in towards the smack's side by a rope attached to the stern of the boat. Marion was set upon her feet, and strong arms reached down and lifted her to the deck. A line was next slung about David and fastened

beneath his arm-pits, and he was roughly hauled aboard. A gag was thrust in his mouth, his ankles and feet strongly bound with rope. The man who had used the telescope and who seemed to be the skipper, had watched the proceedings in silence. He now strolled up and looked at David as he lay flat on the deck, blood flowing freely from a cut on his head.

"Ye have'na killed him, Ah hope," said the skipper to the man who had struck the blow.

"Na," said he; "it wad tak' mair nor that tae kill him. He wadna be bleedin' if he was deid."

"True enough, an' he's bleedin' pretty badly. Ye gav' him an awfu' clout. Ah hae some stickin' plaster in the chest below. Best get a bit an' put it on that wound, an' then let him hae a bucket or twa o' watter. That'll mebbe bring him roond. We maun be aff noo."

The smacks at once stood out to sea. The whole business had been conducted quickly, screened, as was the evident intention, from any chance watcher ashore by the hoisted sails of the vessels. Marion, who had been propped against the low bulwark, looked at first fearfully about her, and then her eyes flashed indignantly as she watched the cavalier treatment of David. She realised only too bitterly that this was Margesson's handiwork, and that he had forestalled them. Her heart sank with dread as she wondered what the final outcome of it would be. Her spirit was by no means cowed, however. She still had David as companion in misfortune, and her belief in his ability to deal with any sort of danger, her knowledge of his great strength, his resource and daring, brought some comfort. She also began to assure herself that Jimmy Drake and her father would lose no time in launching pursuit as soon as ever they discovered that David and she were missing; but she had not gone far with these reflections when the fiendish cunning of Margesson's plot dawned upon her, and she mentally gasped. People would think that she and

David had been drowned! Their beach-shoes and wraps were lying on the sands in the cove, and the assumption would be that they had ventured too far and got swept out to sea. Her daring as a swimmer was well known, and folk would say: "Ah, yes, she overdid it this time. It was bound to happen sooner or later." Still, her father and Jimmy would suspect the truth, and would be sure to act accordingly. She felt very uneasy now, and wished that David would come back to consciousness. The two men who had manned the small boat were working over him, cutting his hair away from the wound and bathing it. Poor Dave! A fierce gust of fury swept over her at the brutality of the treatment he had received. It was difficult to believe that yonder, a bare mile away, lay the land bathed in sunshine, where people she knew were going about their everyday affairs, in perfect security and comfort; that there, almost within hailing distance, was England, the law, police, where one could live a lifetime and never encounter anything more dangerous than an attack of indigestion. Great as had been her belief in the power of Margesson for evil, she had never conceived any such high-handed and daring act as this. Such things, she would have said half an hour ago, could not happen in or near England. It was pure lawlessness. It was an act, a scheme, born out of its time. It did not seem true.

Marion drew up her knees, and with one quick, lithe movement rose to her feet, hopped round, and steadied herself against the bulwark. A glance to seaward told her all she sought. Issuing from between the piers at the mouth of the river was a slim, trim-looking yacht, headed so that presently she would intercept the smack. It was all true enough—too dreadfully true! The whole plot now dawned upon her, and she felt a sudden constriction in her breast.

"He wouldn't dare," she thought, now in a mental panic, pivoting on her toes so that she faced in the

direction of David again. One of the men stood with a bucket poised ready to throw its contents in David's face ; but at that moment he opened his eyes, and stared stupidly at the men. His gaze roved about and presently rested on Marion, and at sight of her his brows drew down in a quick frown. He lay thus for a little while, and his brain cleared rapidly. Then he rolled over on his breast, drew his knees under him, and pressing his forehead against the deck for fulcrum, rose to his feet with a quick jerk. But the effect of that terrible blow could not so soon be shaken off, and the upright position set his brain awirling. He reeled, and fell to the deck again like a drunken man. The fellow with the bucket laughed evilly.

"Ye're better that way, mister," he said. "Juist lie still 'til we get ye aboard the yacht, and then ye can gi'e yersel all the exercise ye want. Tak' it easy against the bulwark."

He set his bucket down, and seizing David by the shoulders dragged him to the rail and propped him up some little distance from Marion.

"An' ye stop where ye are, miss, and sit ye ways doon."

Marion promptly obeyed him, and then her eyes sought David's. The look he gave her set the blood coursing in her veins, and laid her fears at rest. He did not seem in the least perturbed ; there was now a twinkle in his eyes ; he even winked ! He looked at her bindings, and then at his own ; stared interestedly about him, drew his knees up in a comfortable position, and assumed as restful an attitude as possible.

They had not long to wait thus, for presently their captors came and set them on their feet ; and then they saw that the smack was sailing on a parallel course with the yacht, between her and the shore, and separated by about twenty feet of water. The fishermen now bundled them into the small boat,

which, screened by the smack, was rowed to the yacht, against the side of which a gangway ladder had been let down. Standing near the head of this was Margesson, a smile of triumph on his face. Two villainous-looking men stood on the bottom platform ready to receive the prisoners. The boat drew up to the gangway, and was held there whilst the men in her stood David on his feet upon the gunwale. He did not struggle, as he might easily have done, but helped them all he could, and very coolly and agilely hopped from the boat to the gangway platform, and from thence up the ladder step by step unaided. Marion, rather than allow the sailors to help her, essayed the same method, and followed David closely. David had ranged himself alongside Margesson, who took not the slightest notice of him, but kept his eyes riveted on Marion. As she came hopping up the ladder he stepped out upon the upper platform with a wrap over his arm.

"It cuts me to the soul," he said by way of greeting, "to have you come aboard my vessel like this; but there was no other way."

He looked her over with a quick eye, and went on:

"I see they have not been too rough with you. I'm glad. I gave them explicit instructions."

With an exaggerated courtesy he assisted her into the wrap, and then led her to the deck, where he at once proceeded to take the gag from her mouth.

"It was an evil thing to do this to lips that were only made for kisses; but again there was no other way. I infinitely regret it."

"Regret nothing," was Marion's reply the instant the gag was removed, "but say at once what you mean by this outrage."

Margesson smiled, and glanced at David, who stood propped against the rail, his eyes on Margesson, following his every movement. He held his knees bent, his body forward. He seemed ready to spring,

and that was his intention should Margesson lay a too familiar hand upon Marion.

"Ah, don't let us enter into explanations so soon," was Margesson's reply to her. "Rather let me show you that your comfort and welfare have been my first thought. You will come below at once."

He took out a knife, and in a couple of swift strokes severed the bonds at her wrists and ankles.

"I hope you'll not drive me to use force," he said to her. Marion looked questionly at David. Whereat Margesson said: "It's no part of my plan that Mr. Grant should be dumb." And he stepped to David and unfastened his gag. "Don't resist," said David as soon as his mouth was free. "Do as he asks you."

Marion, torn betwixt fear and doubt, looked at Margesson and then said with great reluctance:

"All right. Show the way."

Margesson first turned to one of the men, who had now come up the gangway:

"See that those fastenings are all right," pointing to David; "and then put a rope about his middle, bring him down to the saloon, and tie him up to one of the stanchions."

At which Marion flamed out at him in sudden anger.

"You black devil, you shall pay for this!" And then to David: "Davy, are you sure I should go with him? I've plenty of fight left. We are making it too easy for him."

"You'd only get yourself mauled about, dear, and achieve nothing. They've got the whip hand just now. Don't resist him."

Marion wheeled on Margesson.

"Well, anyhow, that's for using him so badly!" she cried, suddenly swinging her clenched fist into his face. The blow had behind it all the force and energy of her athletic young body. Margesson staggered back, stood scowling for an instant, and then laughed evilly:

"You little fool! You'll be very sorry for that!"

He seized her roughly by the arm, and led her towards the cabin companionway, which was situated amidships, at the side of the small chart and steering house. The mate was at the wheel on the tiny bridge. He was a stout, deep-chested man of about fifty, with a bloated face and a huge, pimply nose; and cold, flat eyes in which the Spirit of Evil had gained one of its myriad physical expressions; the hostility of the Beast was mirrored in them, but no gleam of imagination, no flash of mentality higher than the gorilla's. He was dressed in a shabby uniform and battered peaked cap. Margesson paused at the head of the companion stairs and called to him:

"Put her on the course I laid down for you, Mr. Brain, and signal to the engineer for the last ounce of speed. Drive her, Mr. Brain, drive her."

The mate nodded surlily, spun the wheel, and reached for the engine-room telegraph. At once the yacht began to gather speed, her nose was swung round until the shore was on her quarter, and at that she was set.

Marion meanwhile had preceded Margesson down the companionway into a small but luxuriously furnished saloon. From one side of this cabins opened. Margesson strode to one of these and flung wide the door, disclosing a remarkably roomy state-room for the size of the vessel. On the settee was laid out a pile of woman's clothing: lingerie of the daintiest, the filmiest; silk stockings, shoes. Margesson stepped past Marion with a low bow, entered the state-room and opened the door of a small wardrobe, displaying pretty dresses, a couple of tailor-mades, a dressing-gown. He pulled open the drawers in the chest, to reveal more lingerie, more stockings—everything, in fact, that a girl of refinement could require. He stepped back into the saloon and looked at her with a smile. She herself was staring incomprehensibly

first through the open stateroom door and then at him.

"Will you be pleased to enter, Miss Marion?" he said. "You should not stay in that damp costume any longer than you can help. There is a small bathroom next to this—you'll find the door to it in your room——"

"My room?" she cried, startled.

"Assuredly," he waved towards the stateroom—"your room. Those clothes—they are yours. I hope you will not be too disdainful of them. They were carefully chosen by a lady whose business it is to know what girls of good family wear, and to cater for them. She had them fitted on one of her employees who is very nearly your height and build, so I'm hoping you'll find them all that they should be. Will you be pleased to enter?"

Marion gathered her wrap—his wrap!—about her, and sat on the corner of the table.

"I'll be pleased to do nothing of the sort," she said icily. "I'm waiting until Mr. Grant comes, and then perhaps *you* will be pleased to explain all that—and this!"

"Why, yes," he replied, looking at her with gleaming eyes, in which she fancied she saw a leaping and flickering of hungry passion, a deep, consuming look of desire; "that's part of my plan. Decidedly you will hear what all this—and that—means. It is also part of my plan to allow Mr. Grant to *see* what it means! They are bringing your precious lover now," he finished with his slow smile; "let us hear, then, what he says." And very quietly he shut the door of the stateroom.

David now came hopping down the companion stairs, followed by one of the men, who held him by the ends of a rope bound about his waist. David submitted patiently while the man proceeded to tie him to one of the saloon stanchions. He still made

no attempt to struggle ; this was where he wanted to be ; near Marion. He was biding his time. His whole life of adventure had taught him the lesson never to kick uselessly against the pricks, but to wait until the odds were lessened. Just then he realised that in spite of his strength he was as helpless as a child ; that for the moment Margesson had the complete advantage.

At a nod from Margesson the man, after completing his task, returned to the deck, and then the ex-mayor stepped in front of David, and with folded arms looked him sneeringly up and down.

" Well ? " he said : and the word was an insult, a gloat of triumph.

David grinned.

" You may say that, Steve," he answered cheerfully ; " ' well ' it is, to your way of thinking. You've got a pretty tidy bulge on me this time. You had one before, you remember, but it didn't appear to avail you anything, any more than this will. But you are beginning to be a damned nuisance, Margesson. I see I've got to kill you, just for peace's sake."

Margesson sneered.

" Words, my dear man, words. You don't really mean it ; and even if you did you're in poor shape to carry out that jesting threat. Whereas I, now, I also propose to do some killing ; but by God !——" his voice took on a sudden note of hatred—" there's no jest about my threat. I've got you where I've wanted you at last, and unless my luck is altogether out there's no power on earth to interfere with me. For just think a little. Who will know that you are not drowned ? Your bathing shoes and coats are lying on the beach at Frenchman's Gully. You don't return. You ventured too far. You are drowned. It's very simple. You die ; and the girl is mine ! For the seas are wide, and we know, you and I, of places where a strong-willed man is a law unto himself—

even in this twentieth century of ours. Did you think I'd let you win? Fool! I've sworn this many a day to murder you, just to show that in the ultimate analysis I'm the master. I shall murder you to demonstrate my superiority, and to take a little revenge." His voice sank to a throbbing under-note: "I vowed I'd go through hell to get the girl; and I'm keeping my vow!" He half turned to where Marion had crept up closer by the table, her face now white, her eyes staring in unbelief, her lips set. Margesson reached out and grasped her shoulders and drew her to him with brutal violence, and held her as in a vice.

"See!" he said sneeringly to David: "this is to be part of my revenge. You are to witness me doing this, often, before I destroy you; this and perhaps worse! Even should my plans fail, and you and she escape, all you will have of her is a soiled and broken lily."

He suddenly whipped away the wrap—that wrap he had with so seeming a care for her provided—from about her shoulders; with strong, grasping fingers he tore at her bathing costume, ripped it and laid bare her white body to the waist ere she could make a move to defend herself. And then, as with a fierce cry of outraged modesty she lifted curling fingers to scratch and claw him, he engulfed her in a bear-like embrace, breast to breast, and buried his face in the curving whiteness of her neck. Her desperate hands sought his hair—and then David, supporting himself with his hands grasping the stanchion behind him, shot out his legs and swept Margesson backwards off his feet. In falling he carried Marion with him. His head struck the floor with a heavy thud, momentarily stunning him. Quick as light Marion disentangled herself, rose, and with a half-conscious, instinctive gesture gathered her torn costume about her bosom. The act seemed to bring home to her a complete

realisation of the meaning of Margesson's lascivious, assailing touch.

"You beast!" she hissed, crouching over him as he lay, head and shoulders half-raised in an attempt to rise; and snatching up a heavy, round, stone-ware matchstand from the table she flung it with all her strength at his head. Had her aim been true the missile would have smashed Margesson's skull like an egg-shell. As it was, the matchstand struck him a glancing blow on the temple. Without a sound he sank backward and lay still.

For an instant Marion crouched, staring at her handiwork; and then with a low, sobbing cry turned to David and hid her face on his breast. He bent and kissed her hair, and laughed exultingly.

"That was great, darling. There, there, don't crock up. We are winning the trick. Keep a grip on yourself, and see if you can undo this rope about my waist, and be quick!"

Tremblingly she went and first picked up the wrap and flung it about her, and then set to work on her task.

"Oh, Davy, they've been cruel to you. They've hurt you badly," she sobbed as she worked. "Your poor head!"

"Not half so poor as his!" he laughed. "My God! you'd have killed him if that matchstand had landed square on his head. That's better," as the rope came away in her hands. "Now slip up the stairs and close and fasten the hatch as quietly as you can. It's a choice set of gaol-birds he's got aboard, and I don't want to meet any of them—particularly that mate—until I'm free to use my hands."

She darted away to do his bidding, and when she came back he was sitting on the table looking questioningly about him.

"Rummage around and try and find a knife," he said, "there should be some in that sideboard—ah,

that's the stuff ! " as Marion came back with a gleaming carver. She needed no instructions, but at once began sawing at the stout binding on his wrists.

" I—I hope I don't cut you, dear," she panted. " Keep your palms and fingers out."

" Never mind about cutting me," he answered cheerily. " At the worst you'll only slice a bit of skin."

But the job was quickly done without mishap, and then David, after rubbing his wrists to restore the circulation, seized the knife and severed the bindings at his ankles.

" We are winning," he cried exultingly, " thanks to that matchstand."

He did not waste any time, but taking what remained of the lashings tied Margesson securely at wrists and ankles.

" Now to find some clothes," he said. " I reckon I can dig up all I want for myself from Margesson's stock ; but you——"

" Oh, there are plenty in there," cried Marion, pointing to the stateroom which Margesson had so vainly invited her to enter, " but I'm not having any ! "

David stepped across to the room, flung open the door, and stood on the threshold.

" Hul—lo ! You said it—plenty, by thunder ! Gee, girl, he's fitted you out like a princess ! "

" He wanted me to go in there—said it was my room, and hoped I'd find the clothes satisfactory, the—the——"

" Leather-faced hoodlum, as Jimmy calls him ! Well, this is great ! Marion, my dear, don't be silly. Just sail in and get dressed——"

" I won't, Davy, so there ! They'd make me squirm, those things ! "

" But that's foolishness," said David seriously. " Lord knows how long we may be in getting out of this pickle, and you positively cannot go about like

that. You'll catch cold for one thing—it's chilly at sea when the sun goes down. I want to be prepared for anything. Do as I ask you, dear; it's for the best."

And with gently compelling hands he thrust her reluctant body through the doorway. Then she turned quickly, and held her face up to him.

"Well, kiss me, Davy; and hold me a moment. I'll feel clean then, and the soiling touch of those garments won't reach my body."

There was a little appealing sob in her voice; a forlornness, an air as of one about to undergo a penance, in her attitude which sent a throb of sympathy and tenderness to David's heart. He bent and kissed her, and snuggled her deep in his arms.

"Poor little Rose," he murmured, "be brave! They shan't touch you again. I won't be caught napping twice."

She slipped from his embrace, smiling bravely.

"Oh, Davy, I'm not *frightened*, now that you are free. I've seen you fight! But there's something horrid about the very idea of that man buying all that heap of undies, and having me in his thoughts when he was doing it. There. I'm ready for anything now, Davy, dear; and in two ticks I'll be standing by—to help!"

She gently closed the door upon him.

* * * * *

The adjoining stateroom was evidently Margesson's, and David was able to choose from a wardrobe almost as extensive as that which the ex-mayor had provided for Marion; and in spite of his four inches of extra height he was able to fix himself up tolerably well with the necessary underclothing and a double-breasted blue serge suit, cut on rather more ample lines than the rest of the apparel. He found that Margesson's collars fitted him exactly, but the only footgear that

was big enough was a pair of rope-soled canvas shoes. These pinched a little, but they served. In his raid on Margesson's dressing chest he had also found a heavy-pattern service revolver and a Browning pistol. He loaded and pocketed both these weapons, and provided himself with an ample supply of ammunition for each. During the process of dressing he had begun to whistle cheerily; the light of battle gleamed in his eyes; his air of cool confidence had returned. But as he emerged once more into the saloon he happened to glance up at the skylight, and glanced also into the barrel of a rifle held in aiming position through the open flap!

"Thunder!" he exclaimed: "so soon!" and jumped for the end of the saloon near the companion ladder, where he was out of range. He had caught a glimpse of the face of Mr. Brain, the mate, behind the rifle. "David, my boy," he muttered, "you're losing your knack of dealing with situations like these; you're losing speed. You should have gone straight on deck as soon as you found those guns and got the drop on that bunch before they tumbled to anything. Damn! this is going to be a tighter job than I figured."

At this moment there was a heavy thud on the companion-hatch doors, and then a succession of thuds, and presently the two halves burst inwards and came hurtling down the stairway. David drew his revolver and stood tense and waiting.

"Stay where you are, Marion!" he yelled, but already she was at his side, fully dressed, pale but calm.

"Can I help, Davy?" she asked quietly.

He did not shift his gaze from the stairway.

"Yes, since you are here. Take this, and watch that skylight from this corner; and if anyone drops through aim low and shoot! You cannot miss at that range."

She took the Browning pistol he handed her and

wheeled about. She had never held a firearm of any sort before ; yet she did not quail, but levelled the pistol, rather unsteadily perhaps, though with a degree of firmness that surprised herself.

The head and shoulders of one of the deck hands at this moment came into David's view as the man leaned cautiously down the stairway. At sight of the revolver he drew back hastily, and David heard him say :

" Hell, that long-legged swab's at the foot o' the stairs with a big revolver in his fist ; an' the girl's ditto on'y she's facing the skylight."

" That so ? " came the cold, harsh voice of the mate in reply ; " then we'll just let them stay like that for a while. This job needs thinking about. Watch the companion, Harris ; and you, Timms, keep an eye on the skylight. And if Grant shows himself, fire, and don't be squeamish. He's already supposed to be dead, so the sooner he is the better. Did you see anything of the skipper ? "

" He's lying under the table all trussed up."

" That so ? Well, you understand ? We're all in this up to our necks, and if we don't put it through as the skipper arranged, we not only lose the money, but we'll all see the inside of a gaol—again ! So keep your eyes skinned, both of you."

CHAPTER XXIII
SWORD AND BUCKLER

WHEN Marion had so carefully closed the companion hatch, Mr. Brain, the mate, happened at that moment to be looking over his shoulder as he stood at the wheel, and from the tail of his eye caught the stealthy movement of the doors. His suspicions were at once aroused. He turned over the wheel to a deck hand, and stepped to the saloon skylight, the flaps of which were open. He heard much of the conversation between David and Marion, and saw them enter the staterooms. Whereat he returned to the wheelhouse, and from a locker which contained a surprising armoury for a small yacht on a pleasure cruise, took a repeating rifle, loaded the magazine, and went back to the skylight, where he waited with the weapon trained into the saloon. Had David not glanced upward on issuing from Margesson's cabin, and acted with the lightning speed he had done, he would in all probability have been shot down in cold blood. The mate cursed at thus seeing his opportunity slip by, and then gave instructions to the two deck-hands to batter down the companion-hatch doors, and after a cautious reconnoitring to rush the saloon and overpower David. He was obviously not prepared to learn that David and Marion were armed; neither was he the kind of person to underestimate the fighting abilities of a man like the Australian. He realised at once that to venture down the stairway now was merely to play into the hands of their enemy; and he also realised that with Margesson a helpless prisoner in the saloon David held a very strong position.

David was not slow to realise it either. It had

been no part of his original plan to hold the ex-mayor as hostage. As soon as he had found the arms he had at once decided to adopt the rôle of aggressor, take the crowd on deck by surprise, and at the muzzle of the revolver to bundle them into the saloon to keep their skipper company, and then sail the yacht back to Bede himself. He had been fully alive to the fact that the men he had to deal with were a tough lot, but until he had overheard the mate he had not believed that Margesson had really intended to have him murdered. He had taken his enemy's threats as so much theatrical bluff, as part of a move to create the impression of power and as a means of humiliation. At the worst he had visualised the possibility of being kicked off the boat and left to swim to safety if he could. Of one thing, however, he had been convinced right from the beginning ; and that was Margesson's belief in his ability to carry through the daring kidnapping of Marion to a successful issue. David now realised that the crew had been taken into Margesson's confidence, and perhaps by the offer of a large sum of money had been welded into a band of loyal and utterly unscrupulous helpers, who, so secure did they feel in the belief that their prisoners were already technically dead, were prepared to commit murder on the high seas and almost within sight of England. He also realised that if he and Marion were to escape unscathed from the peril in which the mad desires and colossal egotism of Margesson had placed them, he must let no considerations of chivalry or humane behaviour impede his actions ; he must save himself from possible death, and Marion from worse than death.

" Marion," he said in low tones when the retreating steps of the mate had died away, " it's only right you should know I'm in much graver danger than I thought. I've got to keep out of range of that skylight, and that companionway. You heard the orders : to shoot me on sight."

"They wouldn't dare," whispered Marion, turning a face to him from which all the blood had ebbed; "surely they wouldn't dare!"

"They would, my dear—don't take your eyes from the skylight—and don't be afraid. I reckon I can keep our advantage and round up this bunch of stiffis all right. But I've got to rely on your help."

There was a noticeable wavering of the pistol in Marion's hand. At David's admonition she had turned her eyes again to watch the skylight; but in them now was the staring horror engendered by the calm announcement of his possible murder.

"Oh, Davy," she murmured, "it's beyond belief . . . but—but I'm ready. Tell me what you want me to do. I realise that I'm not to be harmed—the beasts!"

"That's a game little woman," whispered David cheerily. "Well, first thing I'm going to have a smoke."

Perhaps he did it just to lend her confidence; perhaps because he really was "dying for a gasper." At anyrate he coolly stepped past Marion to where Margesson still lay unconscious, grabbed him by the collar of the coat and dragged him swiftly into the corner which was his own present refuge. That done, and with watchful eyes upon the companionway, he knelt and rummaged in Margesson's pockets.

"Ah, cheers! Here's a caseful, and matches. Have one, dear?"

Marion shuddered.

"It would choke me, Dave."

"Not it. Buck you up. I'll light it for you and pass it over."

He did so, and Marion, after a half-hearted puff or two, found it to have a wonderfully soothing and steadying effect.

"Now," whispered David, luxuriously drawing a mouthful of smoke into his lungs: "would you mind

just closing all the ports and fastening the storm caps over them? I'd do it myself, but for the fact that I'd come within range of that fellow at the skylight. Keep your eye on it while you are about the job, although I don't think we need fear any danger of his dropping through now. Still, it's as well to be careful."

Marion did as he bade her, and screwed down the ports on the starboard side of the saloon.

"Now those in the staterooms."

When she had done this he seemed much relieved.

"That secures us from attack in that quarter," he went on, still in low tones, "although it avoidably darkens the room, or will do when we've got the skylight blanked out. That's the next move. I want to be free to get around. Could you see that chap as you moved about?"

"No."

"I expect he's standing well back, in case I try shooting. That's good; it makes the job easier. Jump on the table and drop the skylight flaps and fasten them. If you do it suddenly and swiftly you'll take that fellow by surprise."

Marion was now very cool. She felt that in this particular phase of their peril all depended on her, and she was elated and proud because of David's confidence in her ability to help him.

"If he tries to poke his rifle through I'll shoot," she said with a grimness that delighted him. She went below the skylight and studied how the flaps were manipulated. Then very stealthily she climbed on to the table, crouched for a moment, suddenly stood up, and using both hands simultaneously whipped the flaps down and fastened them. She turned a flushed face to David:

"I did it, Dave!"

"You're a brick, my dear," he said, chuckling gleefully. "Now sit on the end of the table here where you can command the companionway, and if

the chap up there shows as much as a foot shoot at it."

He himself got into action, and crossed over to the port side of the saloon, and with a couple of vicious lunges forced one of the stateroom doors from its hinges. This he wedged across the foot of the companion-stairs. He then took a mattress from one of the bunks and stuffed it into the aperture formed by the skylight.

"There, now, my dear," he said, smiling, as he switched on the light, "you can put that pistol in your pocket. Our defences are complete; those swabs cannot rush us now . . . it's time Margesson was showing signs of coming round."

He lifted the still unconscious man on to the settee which ran down one side of the saloon, loosened his collar, and then went into one of the staterooms and emerged with a jug of water, with which he liberally douched Margesson's face. A quiver ran through him, he gave a sigh, his eyelids fluttered, and then opened. He stared stupidly at David, who regarded him grimly.

"Just lie quiet a moment," said David, "while I rummage out some whiskey. I expect you'll have a bottle or two handy; and by the same token I could do with a jolt myself. I've just remembered that somebody hit me on the head too."

He quickly found the liquor, and poured out a stiff four fingers.

"Get that down, neat," he said, holding the glass to the lips of Margesson, who needed no second invitation, but gulped eagerly at the whiskey. David next helped himself, and then turned to his prisoner, who was now looking at him with a malignant scowl. David leaned against the table.

"I see you are better, or you wouldn't be giving me the glad eye so furiously. Your luck is out, Margesson. Don't repine. What is—is: and a stoneware match-

box properly used has been the undoing of more than one chap who thought he could control the stars in their courses. But that's neither here nor there. We've got to hold a peace conference, at once. This is the position, in case your head isn't clear enough yet to sum it up. You're our prisoner. We in turn are prisoners of your precious crew. That elegant Mr. Brain has ordered me to be shot on sight, and in the meantime has gone away to the other end of the ship to think things out. There's a man on guard at the skylight, and another at the top of the companion-stairs. I see we've enough stores down here to last quite a while. We can live; and so can you—if I think your mangy carcass is worth preserving. I can also shoot you like the dog you are if I'm driven to it. I hold a strong hand; but I'm free to admit your mate has one just as good. Frankly, I don't for the moment see how we are to get out of here unaided except by fighting our way out. And that seems to me too risky. I'm rather young to die by the hand of an ape like Mr. Brain. There you have the situation. You are in a devil of a pickle; and so are we. You can save yourself by saving us. One other thing. There are at least two people back home in Bede who will never believe we are drowned; and if they cannot get the authorities to move to our aid, one of them—my friend Jimmy Drake, not unknown to you perhaps—is resourceful enough to devise some means of doing it himself. So: what about it?"

During this speech the lean, saturnine face of Margesson was a mask that hid the thoughts passing in his mind. Never once did he take his eyes from those of David. Unwavering in their implacable hostility, in their withering contempt, they seemed to widen, to take on the deadly ferocity of a tiger at bay. Bitter hatred flamed in their green depths. There was no hint in them of any desire to come to terms, to debate the state of affairs.

For what seemed an age to Marion, Margesson lay silent after David had finished speaking. The throb of the engines beat through the stillness of the room in heavy, rhythmical waves of sound which seemed like an echo of the pulsing of her own heart. She watched Margesson, but could see no relenting, no softening, no sanity, in his quiescent attitude; could read nothing but that consuming hatred in his eyes. And deep in her consciousness she felt that David's speech had fallen on ears deaf to its logical appeal, and that if she and he were ever to win out from the peril by which they were surrounded it would be by no help or compromise on Margesson's part. She glanced at David, and was reassured. From his magnificent strength, his air of grim determination, his self-reliance and experience of danger she drew comfort for her anxiety. He dominated the situation; and she felt that he would continue to do so, would never allow the advantage they had gained to slip from his grasp. She now had, really for the first time, a clear realisation of their peril; knew that in less than three days the yacht would be out on the wide waters of the Atlantic, a mere speck in that vast waste, where they would be as completely lost as a leaf in a forest. She shuddered to think how near Margesson had come to achieving the full measure of success in his amazing scheme. His words, at that terrible moment when he had held her and taunted David, came beating back in her brain. "You and I, we know of places where a strong willed man is a law unto himself"; and she had read enough and heard enough to believe that there were indeed still such remote corners on the earth.

Margesson's slow smile broke over his face, and at last he spoke.

"It's really funny, Grant, the way you've got it summed up. You entirely mistake the position. I'll give it you in three sentences. I've sacrificed my

business ; I've sacrificed my career ; I've put myself within the pale of the law : in other words, I've sacrificed myself. For what ? You'd have me believe for nothing ! But do you expect me to believe it ? My answer to you is : there will be no conference. I leave the matter in the hands of—Mr. Brain ! ”

The two men gazed into each other's eyes like wrestlers seeking for a grip. David's face was stern ; Margesson's calm and sneering.

“ Good enough ! ” said David slowly. Then without any more waste of words he seized Margesson in rough hands, went over his bindings and made them doubly secure, stretched him on the settee, bade Marion bring a sheet from one of the beds, and with this so lashed his prisoner to the settee-arm that if he made any serious effort to move he would inevitably strangle himself. This did not daunt Margesson, for when David had finished he said :

“ By the way, you've been rather free with my clothes, haven't you ? It's like your confounded insolence ! ”

David looked down at him with grimly compressed lips, said nothing, but proceeded to gag him with ruthless thoroughness.

“ Now we can give our undivided attention to Mr. Brain,” said David. And bidding Marion sit and rest awhile he began to pace up and down the saloon, his brows knitted in thought. His ears were alert, however, for any unusual sounds from deck, and his eyes were never long removed from the companion-way. But this state of checkmate irritated him. To sit and wait on events did not sort with his temperament ; it was his habit to make events wait on him. He knew that the man who strikes first has a priceless asset in any game of wits or threat of danger. Suddenly he stopped at the foot of the stairs, and regarded the opening thoughtfully ; and then turned and looked fixedly at Margesson. A light broke over his face,

the gleam of laughter shone in his eyes, and he smiled at Marion, who had been watching him anxiously.

"I've been feeling all along I'd be much happier on deck in the open," said David quietly; "so I think we'll go there."

"But how?" asked Marion, hardly believing she had heard aright. "They'll kill you!"

"Not with you as sword and his nabs there as buckler!"

He strode to where Margesson lay and began to undo the bonds by which he had so recently fastened him, saying as he worked: "He shall precede me up the stairs; I'll carry him in an upright position before me—thank the Lord I'm strong—and with you following behind me and sticking closer to me than a burr, why, I walk forth armed fore and aft! It's a great idea. I reckon I can lug him up those stairs clasped fondly to me with one arm, and with my free hand tickling his ribs with the point of the revolver, by St. Crispin! they daren't shoot!"

Marion thrilled to the daring and humour of the plan, but had grave doubts about its feasibility.

"You're sure, Dave? There are six men up there."

"One can be sure of nothing in a game like this," he answered, working busily over the knots, "but when my luck is in I believe in riding it. On deck we'll have Mr. Brain in sight, and from where I intend to study his paleolithic countenance, I guess I can anticipate all his moves. Be easy, dear, and put your trust in our buckler, as I'm putting mine in you—our sword! And now, fetch me some more sheets."

These he tore up into broad bands, with which he proceeded to swathe Margesson tightly from heels to elbows—"to prevent the beggar from kicking," he explained to Marion. Then he chuckled: "He looks like an Egyptian Mummy, but I don't suppose he feels nearly so comfortable!"

David then stole across to the companionway

and as silently as he could removed the barricade. Returning, he lifted his now utterly helpless prisoner and set him upright, clasping him strongly about the waist. He next tried a few tentative steps. Margesson wriggled feebly, but so ruthlessly had David bound him that the movement was practically negligible.

"Now, my dear," said David. Marion, her heart beating with excitement, and almost convinced against her judgment that the plan was practical, obediently ranged herself behind him, with arms upstretched and resting on his shoulders. In this way they progressed stealthily towards the foot of the stairs.

"It's like one of those simultaneous dancing turns one sometimes sees at the theatre," chuckled David.

"Don't jest, Davy," whispered Marion. "It's you they want to kill!"

"Tut, tut, my dear," he answered over his shoulder. "I tell you this will get them where they live."

When they had reached the foot of the stairs David whispered:

"Be ready, Marion. I'm going to rush it. As soon as we get to the top we'll whip round behind the companion-hatch, and move backwards towards the bows. That's where I want to be. I must always keep Margesson in front of me. Follow my every movement closely. And thank God again for that He made me strong; this fellow's like a sack of lead."

He set his burden down for a moment, shifted his grip lower in order to bring Margesson's feet clear of the stairs, and then, with a whispered: "Now!" put forth every ounce of strength and energy he possessed, and with head tucked down behind Margesson's shoulders, but with one eye peeping past, he moved quickly and silently up the stairs. He was almost at the top before the man on guard, who had lounged back against the rail with rifle held in the crook of his arm, heard or saw. The fellow started forward, amazement on his face, and brought his

weapon to the "ready." David reached the deck at the same instant, and the man was then so close that his rifle muzzle jabbed David's arm where it encircled Margesson's body. Like a flash of lightning David shot out his foot and took the man in the pit of the stomach. The rifle clattered to the deck, and the man, emitting a sudden groan, stumbled back gasping like a fish out of water. The other deck hand was at the wheel, with rifle loosely trained on the cabin skylight a few paces in front of him. Mr. Brain was aft, sitting on the bulwark in conference with the second engineer, whom he had roused.

David whipped round behind the companion-hatch, backed quickly, and then made a half-turn so that he faced the man at the wheel.

"Cover me on the right side," he whispered to Marion; and in this formation they began to edge quickly towards the bows. The man at the wheel gaped, muttered "Hell!" and holding the wheel with his knee raised his rifle, paused as if nonplussed at the situation, and then aimed at David's feet. David on the instant raised his revolver and fired for the man's shoulder. At that range he could not miss his objective. The rifle fell from the steersman's hands. At the sound of the shot there was a cry from aft, and the mate and the engineer started running.

"Quick, Marion!" called David, "follow me."

He seized Margesson with both arms, and carrying him thus, fairly ran for the bows. Once there he stood in the fork of the bulwarks and propped his prisoner in front of him. Marion, who had breathlessly, but with clear brain and pounding heart, anticipated his every movement, ranged herself unprompted alongside Margesson. David was thus effectually screened. Marion had drawn her pistol. A wave of exultation had come over her. The manœuvre had succeeded beyond her uttermost hopes, thanks to the magnificent strength and audacity of her hero

over. She laughed aloud, a trifle hysterically, as the mate and engineer, carried close by their headlong rush, halted suddenly.

"Come on!" she cried; "come on, you beasts, you cowards!"

David chuckled to hear her as he crouched behind his human breastwork. Then, very deliberately, he levelled his revolver between them and fired twice quickly. In each case he shot low, aiming for the legs. Both shots told. The first one shattered the mate's right knee; the second hit the engineer in the thigh. The men staggered, each grasping for his wounded limb. On the instant David darted out, in two jumps was on them, and with a swift left and right laid them unconscious on the deck.

The man who had been kicked in the stomach had in the meantime recovered his wind, and Marion, glancing past David, saw the fellow stoop and pick up his rifle and take aim.

"Look out, Dave!" she screamed. "The other man—he's going to fire!"

"Duck, then! You're in line!" cried David instantly, flinging himself prone on the deck as the rifle cracked.

The bullet zipped above him, and, by a malicious twist of fate, took Margesson fairly between the eyes! It so happened that it was he who was in line, not Marion. He was killed instantaneously, and never knew the hand that slew him! Braced all stiff as he was, his body hung in the air a moment, and then pitched slowly forward to the deck. Marion, who had obeyed automatically David's command, heard the dull "phut" of the bullet as it smashed into the bone of Margesson's forehead. Her heart stopped for a beat, and then pounded furiously on as with horror-stricken eyes she watched Margesson fall.

David gave a hasty glance backward from his prone position, saw what had happened, called:

“Down flat, Marion!” and himself started violently into action again.

The man who had fired that fatal shot gaped for a moment at the dire result of his handiwork, and then with a loud curse fumbled with the rifle to throw out the spent shell. The few seconds respite were all that David needed. Like a runner leaping from the mark he launched himself at the man and landed on him in mid-air, bearing him headlong backwards to the deck. With quick, ruthless hands he wrenched the rifle from him and clubbed him where he lay. Then, with never a pause in his volcanic series of movements, he leaped up, jumped for the bridge, and clouted the steersman, who, with knee still braced against the wheel and half-leaning over it, was holding his wounded shoulder with both hands. The man collapsed and slid away.

There now remained for the moment only the cook and the chief engineer. The cook had come out of his galley, and had stood a startled spectator of those whirlwind happenings. The engineer was peering from the engine-room skylight. Both of these men were unarmed. David promptly advanced upon them with revolver levelled.

“Back among your pots and pans,” he growled fiercely to the cook, who, giving him one scared look, whipped round and bolted into the galley like a rabbit. David slid the doors on him and fastened them. He then turned his attention to the engineer. Into the whiskey-mottled cheeks of this gentleman there rushed a colour long unknown to them. He actually turned pale when David advanced upon him, and bobbed away from the skylight. David leaned in and said to him as he stood off in one corner of the small engine-room:

“Just keep them moving, Steve. If you play any monkey tricks I’ll come down and simply—simply smash you!”

He fastened the engine-room companion-hatch, and then for the first time since he had come on deck his face relaxed, and a smile played about his lips. He did not, however, abate for an instant his activities. Victory was undubitably his, but there was still much to be done ere it was altogether secure. He strode to the bows, where Marion was now rather weakly getting to her feet, and turned Margesson over on his back. The smile left David's lips as he gazed grimly down on the dead man.

"Rough luck!" he muttered. "The beggar didn't quite deserve that."

He took off his coat and covered the face of Margesson. Then he turned to Marion, who was looking with scared, admiring eyes at the stern figure of her lover.

"Slip down to the saloon and bring up another sheet, and rummage round for the medicine chest," said David. "Bring whatever you think will be useful. I've got to fix up those fellows' wounds."

Marion started like one in a dream to do his bidding, then turned and touched him with what seemed a speculative gesture. He looked questioningly down at her.

"I—I only wanted to make sure it wasn't a dream, Davy," she said tremulously. "You mopped them up like a—a tornado. And Margesson's killed—and you are a terrible, glorious man!"

She bent and kissed his arm, and then ran to the saloon.

David next went to the bridge, pulled the unconscious steersman away from the wheel and lashed it. He then lifted the man and carried him forward and laid him beside the mate and the second engineer, afterwards serving the other deck-hand in a like manner. The mate was beginning to recover consciousness when Marion returned. David got busy at once.

"Just keep an eye on Mr. Brain," he said to her,

“ while I plug this fellow’s wound ”—indicating the man whom he had shot in the shoulder ; “ his is the most serious.”

Deftly, as one experienced in the work, he rendered first-aid, and when he had finished carried his prisoners one by one down into the saloon, where he made them as comfortable as possible, though he thought it necessary, for safety’s sake, to bind their ankles and wrists. The mate, who had now fully regained his senses, watched him with a bitter, malignant scowl ; and when it came to his turn to be bound made profane and forceful protest.

“ Damn your eyes, aren’t we suffering pain enough, without adding to our discomfort ? What are you afraid of, strapping us like this ? We’re a likely crew now to cause you any trouble.”

“ I’m not taking any more chances,” was David’s cold response. “ Your knee is pretty bad, but your other leg is sound, Mr. Brain ; and your will for evil is, I make no doubt, as rampant as ever. Had you the opportunity you’d kill me with as little compunction as you’d crush a fly. Therefore I’m just making certain that the opportunity will never come your way. If you’ll lie quiet and think a little on what you really deserve, you’ll realise that I’m treating you with the tenderness of a brother ! ”

A sneer twisted the lips of Mr. Brain.

“ Yes, you’re a ministering angel, in fact. What I deserve is a damned good kicking for letting you turn this trick single-handed against six of us—seven if you count the cook. And I’d like to know what that fool of a skipper was doing to give you the chance to get going.”

David picked up the stoneware matchstand from where it still lay in a corner, and stood it near the mate.

“ There is your answer, Mr. Brain.”

And leaving the mate to ponder this riddle he strode cheerfully on deck, and went smilingly to Marion,

who was leaning against the rail near the charthouse, her face, now that the danger and excitement were over, drawn and wan.

"Well, my dear," said David. "We won the trick!"

She turned and fell weakly against him, and then burst into tears.

"Oh, Dave!" was all she could say.

He took her in his arms and held her tenderly.

"There, there, darling! It's all over now, and we'll be back in time for tea! You've had a terrible experience, but I never want a better companion in a scrap. You were great, dear, and gritty as a man."

She sobbed against his breast for a little while.

"That man—Margesson—did turn out a beast; but—but I'm sorry about him, Davy," she said presently between her sobs. "It all came because he wanted me so—so much. I think it must have turned his brain. I should never have let him know me. It was my fault in the beginning."

"Tut-tut," he chided her. "That's sheer nonsense. He was the victim of his own monstrous egotism. All his life he had the seeds of this madness in him. And don't forget, dear, that mad or sane he planned to kill *me*! It's simply ridiculous to blame yourself for his fate. You are overwrought. To-morrow you'll remember that he only saw your beauty with the eyes of possession. Your soul he never saw. If he had really loved you do you think he would have acted as he did? There, there, Rose of my heart, it doesn't need arguing."

She looked up, and there was a pathetic smile gleaming through her tears.

"I know it doesn't, really, Dave. But death is terrible; and he was a young man. It seemed, when you were down there and I was alone with him—it—on the deck, that his body, so still, accused me . . . I'm better now, Davy. I'll sit on the bridge facing you

while you steer ; and you can talk to me about your wonderful South Seas, and the things you'll show me. And then I'll forget."

* * * * *

They came in sight of Bede without further incident. As David brought the yacht about to make for the harbour entrance, a small motor boat dashed out at high speed from between the piers, and plunged towards them with a smother of foam at her bows. David fixed his gaze on the boat for a moment, and then said to Marion with a chuckle :

" I knew the old bucko wouldn't waste any time in getting after us."

She turned her head quickly.

" It's Jimmy Drake," said David, " with your father and, I believe, Mr. Cossar."

He rang the engine-room telegraph : " Stop ! "

As the boat neared them a stir of excitement seemed to pass among its occupants. Three figures stood up, and then Jimmy's hail came pealing over the water.

" Ahoy ! You Dave ! Got the pirates under hatches ? "

" You bet ! " bellowed David.

" Marion all right ? "

" You bet ! " shrilled Marion through her hollowed hands.

Jimmy was seen to slap his leg. The boat dashed on and began to circle, and presently slid up alongside. David left the bridge, and ran to lower the gangway. Marion followed hard on his heels. From the rail she looked down into her father's anxious face.

" Hello, dad ! Don't worry any more. I'm all right, and unharmed."

" Thank God ! " said the shipbuilder fervently. He was visibly trembling. " I never thought to see you again ! "

He sat down rather weakly.

"Does Mumsie know?" asked Marion, struggling with a sudden desire to cry as she saw how shaken her father was.

"No. Mr. Drake came to the office. I—I don't know what I'd have done without him and Johnno. And you, dear—what a blessing Dave was with you—" he turned to where David was busy with the lowering gear. "You all right, Dave?"

"In the pink," called David, smiling as he worked. "Bit of a lump on the top of the head, that's all."

Jimmy Drake now cut in rather plaintively.

"I don't suppose there's any more scrappin' to do, Dave?"

"No," replied Dave, grinning down at him.

"Nor a face a feller could warm his fists against?"

"You're unlucky, Jimmy . . . how did you get wind of what had happened?"

"Oh, Johnny and I saw the yacht put to sea. After that we burned petrol and space, hiking it to the Gully, where we saw your clothes on the beach. I tumbled then to the whole pretty little plot. Johnny scouted round for a friend who owns this motor boat, and I went along and picked up Mr. Fay—and so here we are."

Soon they were all aboard. Marion ran to her father, laughing and crying together, and Mr. Fay tried to shake hands with David and kiss his daughter at the same time. Jimmy put an affectionate arm about David's shoulder.

"You son-of-a-gun! How in thunder did you do it? Seven of 'em!"

"Oh!" cried Marion. "He was like a tornado, Jimmy—glorious, terrible!"

"I bet he was," said Jimmy.

"Rubbish," said David modestly, reaching out and shaking hands with Johnny Cossar, who stood shyly away from the group. "I had all the luck, and a fighting partner as game as they make them."

"Well, I dunno," said Jimmy; "seven to two is pretty tidy odds. But tell me, Dave. Is Margesson able to stand up? Can't I just lay hands on him for once?"

A grim look came over David's face.

"Margesson is dead."

A sudden silence fell upon the party.

"Dead?" said Mr. Fay after a pause.

"Killed accidentally by one of his own crew."

"And by a bullet intended for Dave," said Marion.

"Terrible! Terrible!" muttered Mr. Fay, very much perturbed. "Did he plan to murder you, Dave?"

"He did."

Very briefly David related his story of their capture, and the incidents which followed.

"Amazing!" said the shipbuilder when David had finished. "Who would have believed it? A terrible end, Dave; but just! The pity of it! For he was a clever man, and might have gone far. But I'm afraid all through life he had been the creature of his own mad lust for mastery. The gods always destroy them that violently take justice and revenge into their own hands. . . . and you, my boy: I'm proud of you, and humble. I've to thank you for saving my girl from worse than death. Few men could have done what you did. It was——"

"Homeric!" murmured Johnny Cossar.

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